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HINTS TO PREACHERS

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BY

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PREFACE

THE Title, *Hints to Preachers,* may serve to indicate that this volume does not pretend to be a formal treatise on Homiletics. The chapters were written as inspiration and leisure might suggest and were published casually in *The Ecclesiastical Review.* Although reprinted here in a fairly logical sequence, they remain virtually as they first appeared, because any serious alterations might easily defeat the purpose held in view during their preparation. This purpose was to avoid formalism in treatment; to attempt some slight vivacity in style; to present, by liberal excerpts from other writers, some desirable variety in exposition. In brief, the purpose was to give a chatty character to hints, widely selected and (if such a thing be any longer possible) original, on the always timely subject of Preaching. In a treatment so casual, albeit not unmethodical, doubtless some repetition of statements and some overlapping of topics will occur. Perhaps these may be condoned on the score that, after all, the old maxim applies here as elsewhere—*Repetita juvant.*

"It is," says *The Expository Times* (Edinburgh, October, 1919), "one of the misfortunes of books on preaching that they are unattractive." This fact may be due either to an uninspiring solemnity of style or to an over-formalism of method, or to a soporific combination of both. The reader will at once perceive that the present volume strives to escape solemnity of style—the "preaching tone" to preachers. He may not so readily perceive, however, that the sequence of chapters is sufficiently methodical to warrant their use by theological students for private reading. It is true that the chapters were designed rather for the busy priest, but even a young levite may be glad to have a concrete view of his future task as a preacher of the word of God.

Some features of the sequence may raise pertinent questions of order. Why should the series begin with a discussion of the Long, the Short, the Miniature Sermon? Because the preacher should first of all realize that a sermon must be planned with a clear apprehension of its time-limits. We must cut our pattern by our cloth. It is a mistake to conceive of a short sermon as only a longer one "boiled down," or of a miniature sermon as a short one skeletonized. In any case, the sermon should be plain (a relative term, it is true), and this character-

istic is to be held in view throughout the planning and composition of the sermon. Again, why should the Object be next considered? Because that consideration will suggest subject, text, introduction and method of treatment. Why should the title be so far down in the list? Because it is the last thing to be determined and, mayhap, the least of the things to be considered.

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
	PREFACE	5
I.	THE LONG SERMON	11
II.	THE SHORT SERMON	29
III.	THE MINIATURE SERMON	48
IV.	PLAIN SERMONS	59
V.	THE OBJECT OF A SERMON	77
VI.	THE DOCTRINAL SERMON	96
VII.	THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SERMON	116
VIII.	THE OPENING TEXT	133
IX.	THE "ACCOMMODATED SENSE" IN SERMONS	145
X.	SERMON ILLUSTRATION	166
XI.	SERMON ANECDOTAGE	186
XII.	PREPARING TO PREACH	207
XIII.	"PRACTICAL COUNSEL" FOR PREACHERS	224
XIV.	SERMON NOTE-BOOKS	245
XV.	SERMON MATERIAL	260
XVI.	SERMON TITLES	274
	REFERENCE WORKS QUOTED	287
	ALPHABETICAL INDEX	291

HINTS TO PREACHERS

I

THE LONG SERMON

1

"Paul was long preaching."—*Acts* 20:9.
"Why preach so long?"—*The Abbé Mullois.*

ST. PAUL'S sermon at Troas was doubtless a long one. He discoursed with the folk who had gathered in the upper chamber to break bread and, says St. Luke, "he continued his speech until midnight." We are not told how small was the room or how large was the crowd. But from the fact that Eutychus was sitting on the window, we may perhaps fairly conjecture that the room was very well filled with people. The Evangelist does tell us, however, that there were a great number of lamps in that upper chamber, and seems to give this fact as a reason or excuse for the deep sleep that oppressed Eutychus, who "by occasion of his sleep fell

from the third loft down, and was taken up dead."

Having brought the young man to life again, St. Paul, "breaking bread and tasting, and having talked a long time to them, until daylight," departed. His discourse thus appears to have lasted all night. Shall it be claimed as a worthy precedent for the Long Sermon of later times?

Did the Abbé Mullois conveniently forget the precedent, when he pleaded[1] so eloquently against the Long Sermon? "On the other hand," he asks, "why preach so long? I know not how we have allowed ourselves to be led into these lengthy discourses. What is the good of it? What is the object? Now, power and majesty are always chary of words; yet such words are not the less efficacious for being few."

St. Gregory the Great noted[2] an apparently similar conflict between the words of Our Lord: "If any man come to me, and hate not his . . . wife . . . he cannot be my disciple" (St. Luke 14:26) and the words of St. Paul: "Husbands, love your wives . . ." (Eph. 5:25), and asks: "*Numquid aliud judex nuntiat, aliud præco clamat?*" He shows that there is no real conflict between the two declarations.

Neither is there any real opposition between

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[1] Mullois, *The Clergy and the Pulpit*, chap. vi.
[2] *Homilia 37 in Evang.*

the act of St. Paul at Troas and the counsel of the good Abbé to his French comrades in the ministry of the word. A rule is defined or limited by its appropriate exceptions. The ordinary parish sermon, the "Sunday discourse," is one thing. It happens regularly, week after week, year after year. The incident at Troas was not to be duplicated weekly or annually.

Again, a preacher coming from outside the parish limits is ordinarily a stranger to the congregation. His personality, his peculiarities (whether attractive or manneristic), his relatively fresh point of view, his probably oft-rehearsed homiletic effort, his voice and gesture and deportment—all these are novelties whose effect will take some minutes to wear off. Such a visitor, mounting the pulpit for the first time in any given locality, may confidently hope for a more sustained interest on the part of the congregation than the pastor or long-time curate could reasonably depend upon. His discourse may properly be somewhat more extended.

Other considerations will avail to construct exceptions to the general rule. The people look for a longer discourse on the "grand" occasions of the parish life—the panegyric delivered on the patronal feast, the dedication of the church, the "opening of the new organ," the first Mass

of a former parishioner, and the like. Even what Charles Lamb pathetically styled "the old familiar faces" of pastor and curates may attract, in such cases, more than the usual sympathy and attention of the people, with a resultant greater tolerance of length in the sermon. An outsider—especially if he have some reputation as a pulpit orator—has a double advantage of novelty and reciprocal curiosity, on the one hand, and of relative freshness of presentation of his theme and reciprocal sympathy of the people, on the other hand.

With such exceptions granted, we may consider now the ordinary Sunday preachments made by the old familiar faces.

2

"Prolixity only wearies and confuses."—*M. Almeras.*

"Long sermons bore us."—*M. de Cormenin.*

"For many persons . . . the time at their disposal is very limited."—*Ralston Markoe.*

"The Englishman's family dinner on Sunday is an event which cannot be trifled with."—*Dean Howson.*

"The preacher should so deliver his sermons that they be not painful efforts to him."—*Fénelon.*

These brief quotations summarize well the

arguments against the Long Sermon. Four of them consider the plight of the listeners. People are bored, wearied, confused. In such a state, their minds are not impressionable, their memories are not retentive. "Believe me," said St. Francis de Sales to the Bishop of Belley,[3] "I speak from long experience; the more you say, the less people will remember; and the less you say, the more they will profit. Those who load their hearers' memory destroy it, just as you put out a lamp by filling it too full, or kill plants by unmeasured watering. When a discourse is too long, the end makes one forget the middle, and the middle puts out the beginning. Indifferent preachers are bearable if they are brief, but even good preachers become intolerable when they are lengthy. Depend upon it, there is no more detestable quality a preacher can possess than tediousness."

Another point of view is contributed by Ralston Markoe. "No matter how devout they are," he writes in *Impressions of a Layman*,[4] many persons can give but little time to sermons "on account of many circumstances beyond their control."

What Dean Howson says[5] of the English-

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[3] *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, p. 347.
[4] Page 136.
[5] Ellicott, *Homiletical and Pastoral Lectures*, p. 53.

man's family dinner on Sunday may have a wide application; for that event, the Dean adds, "has a very important bearing on his power of listening continuously after the middle part of the day." Canon Oakeley [6] writes somewhat to the same effect. Father Keatinge, also, has [7] some pertinent observations.

On the other hand, Fénelon pays [8] attention to the preacher himself. Long sermons may fatigue him so much, both in their composition and in their delivery, that he shall feel tempted

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[6] Oakeley, *The Priest on the Mission*, Lect. 11: "A sermon in the course of the High Mass should consist, as a general rule, of a short explanatory and practical application of the Epistle or Gospel of the day, and especially of the latter. There is no rule without an exception; but I think that long sermons on topics which have no immediate connection with the subject of the day, are out of place in the middle of the Mass. Besides protracting the Mass to an inconvenient length, they tend to interrupt its continuity. This objection applies to long sermons and still more to irrelevant sermons on the greater festivals, as for example on Easter-day." Speaking for his own communion, Dean Howson points out the long character of its morning service, and thinks that an hour given to Sunday preaching might well assign twenty minutes to the morning, and forty minutes to the evening service.

[7] Keatinge, *The Priest: His Character and His Work*, Lect. II: "At the West End of London where late dinners are customary, it is usual to have Vespers in the afternoon, and popular devotions in the evening; whereas, in those parts of the metropolis where earlier habits prevail among the wealthier parishioners, it is usual to defer Vespers till the evening. In either case, however, the sermon forms a necessary and important part of the arrangement, and should take its character from the composition of the audience."

[8] Fénelon, *Three Dialogues on Pulpit Eloquence* (tr. Eales), p. 156.

to preach but seldom. "I should wish that the preacher," he says, "whoever he might be, should deliver his sermons in such a way that they would not be painful efforts to him, and that thus he would be able to preach frequently. It would be desirable that all his sermons should be short, so that he might preach every Sunday after the Gospel without inconveniencing himself, and without wearying the people." Eales, his translator into English, places a foot-note here: "The length of a sermon oftentimes has much to do with its efficiency. That which consumes time and adds nothing to effect should be studiously avoided. Give the best thoughts in the most carefully chosen language. Study brevity. Never weary an audience . . . (Rev. W. A. Bushnell)." With its insistence on the boredom of the people, the foot-note is in strong contrast with Fénelon's fear respecting the preacher.

The general denunciation of the Long Sermon is quite choral in the variety of the component voices and in the wonderful harmony they produce. More illustration here, however, might produce the same sad results as those which are denounced by the chorus. And—to change slightly the remark of M. de Cormenin—"long articles bore us."

There is a pertinent question which must not

be overlooked. What *is* a Long Sermon? Is it measured by time or by tedium?

St. Paul's discourse at Troas was very long, if measured by time. Was it also tedious? That may well be doubted. Eutychus fell asleep, it is true; but St. Luke seems to lay the blame on the many lamps in the upper chamber. The magnetic personality of St. Paul, the rarity of his presence, the import of his message—all these things must have made his speech absorbingly interesting. Measured in terms of tedium, it was probably quite brief.

The question of time should be taken up now in some detail.

3

"The discourse should not exceed an hour."—*St. Francis Borgia.*

"The Sunday discourses should not occupy more than three-quarters of an hour."—*St. Alphonsus Liguori.*

"Provided it occupy half an hour, it cannot be too short."—*St. Francis de Sales.*

"Twenty minutes—with a leaning to mercy."—*Baron Alderson.*

Measuring the length of the sermon by the clock, we find varying estimates of prudent calculation. The first three quotations represent clerical opinion of an earlier school. St. Francis

Borgia assumes [9] that the preacher might occasionally wish to speak at even greater length than an hour: "Let him also be prepared to cease speaking as soon as the signal is given by his companion, though he has hardly delivered half of what he has prepared to say; for it is better to be silent through obedience than without it to speak eloquently. It would, however, be prudent to limit the discourse so that it may be delivered within an hour, and it should not exceed that time, for if the preacher goes beyond an hour the hearer is not benefited; on the contrary, he is wearied and conceives disgust for what he has heard." Now, it was just the hour's discourse against which M. Mullois protested with equal humor and energy.

St. Alphonsus Liguori offers [10] a kind of scale for the desirable length of a sermon: "The Lent sermons should not exceed an hour; and the Sunday discourses should not occupy more than three quarters of an hour; but the parochial instruction should not be longer than half an hour, including the act of contrition, to which, ordinarily, it is advisable to accustom the people."

The Bishop of Belley declares that St.

[9] "Method of Preaching," *Instructions on Preaching* (tr. Boyle), p. 26.

[10] Liguori's Instructions (p. 14) prefixed to *Sermons for all the Sundays of the Year* (tr. Callan).

Francis de Sales frequently quoted the rule: "*Hora integra inepto prædicatori prælonga, idoneo satis longa videtur: tres horæ quadrantes a bonis æstimatoribus horæ integræ præferuntur.*" A whole hour might well seem too long for a poor preacher, and quite long enough, in all conscience, even for a good one; and the Saint's sympathies evidently go out to those who would prefer the discourse of three quarters of an hour. But in his Letter on Preaching he whittles this length down still further: "It is always better that the sermon be short rather than long. In this point I have failed up to the present, but I am correcting myself. Provided it occupy half an hour, it cannot be too short."

M. Almeras, in the method of preaching drawn up by him for the Congregation of the Mission, doubtless referred[11] to "mission sermons," rather than to the ordinary Sunday discourse, when he declared a preference for the forty-five minutes' sermon: "The preacher should not exceed three quarters of an hour or thereabouts on working days, and, though on festivals and Sundays he may speak an hour, he should never go beyond it."

The point of view has changed much in these

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[11] Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

latter days. Baron Alderson's quizzically judicial verdict, with its leaning to mercy, would seem harsh to-day even to many clerical minds. Writing recently in *The American Ecclesiastical Review,* "An Observer" calmly declares [12] that "no Sunday sermon should take over fifteen minutes to deliver." If one may draw any sort of dividing line between the Long and the Short Sermon, we have thus been delivered into the realm of the Short Sermon. Of the conditions prevailing in that happy "narrow plot of ground" some account will be given in a succeeding chapter. Would a discourse of twenty minutes be properly labeled a "Long Sermon"?

The change in sentiment may possibly be accounted for by the rush and worry of modern life. Our mechanical contrivances appear almost to have annihilated time and space. Wireless telegraphy and the aeroplane are symbolic. The leisurely essay has dwindled into the editorial, the editorial into the paragraph, the paragraph into the headline. The pulpit has felt the change. Fortunately, however, the humorous remark of Richard Whiteing does not apply to Catholics; they do not go to *The Times* to learn their moral duties and to Westminster Abbey to hear the latest news.

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[12] January, 1920, p. 86.

4

"Brevis esto."—Hor. *De Arte Poetica.*
"Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio."—Hor. *Ibid.*

Another paradox? At any cost, the preacher must deliver his message clearly. Time will be the cost, he may retort. The same ancient counselor that commands brevity concedes the grave danger of obscurity.

With wonderful unanimity, writers on homiletics declare against the Long Sermon. One of them,[13] nevertheless, became restive under the choral iteration. He admits, indeed, that if a sermon is to be effective, it must not be "inordinately" long. On the other hand, he contends that the length of any address must be determined by its subject: "If that can be clearly opened up and faithfully enforced in twenty minutes, then there is no need to take more; if, however, that cannot be done in less than an hour, then, even such an amount of time should be cheerfully conceded to it. The preacher should stop when he has reached a conclusion; that is, when he has brought his arguments and illustrations to such a focus that the truth he means to establish is burned in on the souls of

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[13] Taylor, *The Ministry of the Word,* p. 126.

those whom he addresses. If he go on after that, his continuance is an impertinence; but if he end before that, his sermon is a fragment, and will lead to no result."

Even an hour "should be cheerfully conceded" to any message whose clear and convincing presentation may demand such an amount of time. Thus Dr. Taylor. On the other hand, "a man must be endowed with extraordinary genius who can bring forcible thoughts to bear upon one and the same subject for the space of a whole hour." Thus the Abbé Mullois. Both statements are true, but they may be harmonized in practice. One obvious method would be to avoid subjects that demand a lengthy treatment, or to divide the consideration of a large subject into successive sermons. Cardinal Newman thought that some of the masterpieces of French pulpit eloquence really comprise as many as three distinct sermons. Each "point" in the division constituted in effect a new discourse. After all, one could write a large volume on the Immaculate Conception. It is nevertheless true that a clear sermon on that theme need not occupy more than twenty minutes—or fifteen, or ten, if need be.

Many other considerations enter into the question of length besides that of the subject-matter. The extempore discourse will ordinarily con-

sume more time in the proper presentation of a theme than the written one. The poorly prepared extempore sermon will give less light and burn much longer than the carefully prepared extempore sermon. The entirely impromptu address will very rarely give any light, however long it burn.

The clear sermon presupposes exact thinking and exact expression. The brief sermon further supposes careful revision of both thought and expression. The "ready speaker" may misconceive his ability. Doubtless, conference, as Lord Bacon declared, has made him a ready man. He has thus gained facility in the expression of thought. But "facility alone will not do," as Bishop Purcell noted in his *Diary* when summing up the homiletic effort of a certain preacher. The ready talker is very apt to be long-winded. He is further apt to substitute wordiness for the labor of exact thinking. He will avoid the unpleasant task of carefully writing his thoughts down on paper, of mercilessly pruning them, and of logically arranging them. He will give us a disjointed, groping, fragmentary, albeit a flowing, discourse. He can be as brief as you wish, however; for he is not hampered by the necessities of plan, division, subject or purpose of the discourse he is asked to deliver. But he can hardly be clear, unless

indeed the rhetorical experience of the race has been sadly misrepresented in all the treatises on the *ars dicendi*. Once more. He can be brief, if you so command. Clear he can hardly be.

For it is writing that maketh the exact man. The exact man first defines his meaning clearly to his own mind. The art of rhetoric will show him how to make that meaning clear to other minds. If, then, one would combine clearness with brevity, he must first write his sermon down, then revise it in the interests of clearness. Next comes the task of achieving brevity without loss of clearness, and here the *ars dicendi* will again come to his aid.

When the sermon has been written down in full, the process of compression will begin. The exordium must be trimmed carefully. It is by no means a negligible quantity. It is commonly a necessity of clearness in the presentation of a theme. But it is nevertheless a perilous part of the discourse. A clear apprehension of the precise object which the sermon seeks to attain, and a clear definition of the theme which is to be treated—these two clarities will help greatly toward a brief exordium. For, once we perceive clearly whither we are going and what we hope to get at the end of the journey, we are less likely to pursue our object by roundabout ways.

We shall avoid, with equal comprehension, the morass that threatens, and the flowery meads that tempt, the unthinking wayfarer. The peroration will benefit in the same way and for similar reasons. When we have reached the end of our journey, when we have obtained what we sought, we shall be willing to sit down and rest.

As for the body of the discourse, we shall be well-advised to preserve inflexibly the rule of unity—unity, that greatly misunderstood and therefore often discredited element of good rhetoric. The preacher can be brief by selecting a theme which will not need much development for its clear and persuasive presentation. If he choose a large subject, he will need many "points" for its proper exposition, and his sermon will inevitably be long. Although such a sermon may be presented clearly enough, it will not be clearly understood by the congregation, for mere fatigue will ultimately render the people dull of apprehension.

Having thus achieved structural clearness and a certain amount of brevity, the preacher will next attend to the mere matter of expression. He will cultivate conciseness. Mullois gives us an apt illustration. A witty workingman, who had been listening to a sermon, was once asked—

"What did the preacher say? What do you remember of his sermon?"

"Nothing at all."

"How's that? Surely, you heard him?"

"Perfectly."

"How is it, then, that you did not understand anything?"

"Ah," he replied, in an original language which only the people can command, "because all he had to say was hid behind a mass of words."

Conciseness is an art. It can be practiced, but it should first of all have been taught. This implies a recurrence, if need be, once again to the manuals (possibly never "well-thumbed" as the trite qualification has it) of our college days. Mullois summarizes beautifully this need of hard and conscientious work: "Prune away all redundant words, all parasitical epithets, using only those that triple the force of the substantive. Be chary of words and phrases; economize them as a miser does his crown-pieces."

While the preacher thus steers a wary pathway between the Scylla of lengthiness and the Charybdis of obscurity, he may yield to another temptation. He may seek brevity, not so much in the sermon as in its rapid manner of delivery. He should remember that the minds of his congregation are not likely to be very alert and

agile. Even the better cultivated minds of professional laymen are something of a *tabula rasa* in respect of spiritual concepts. What is most elementary in spiritual science to the preacher may easily prove profound to the layman. While a prolix presentation of truths in any one of the orders of knowledge may weary a listener and dull the edge of his mental appreciation, it still is to be remembered that conciseness has its perils. The briefly stated proposition should be allowed sufficient time to sink in, even when it is clearly expressed.

Finally, the desired brevity should not be such as to neglect the constant use of connectives as well between sentences as between paragraphs. Cardinal Newman points out the necessity of these links of discourse even in written compositions. The need is obviously greater in spoken language. The perplexed reader can retrace his steps. The listener can not do this.

II

THE SHORT SERMON

1

CANON SHEEHAN must have learned very soon in his priestly life to appreciate rightly the value of the short sermon. One of his earliest assignments was to a curacy in an Exeter parish. Writing nearly forty years after this event, a curate of that parish declares[1] that Father Sheehan, even in those early days, was generally recognized to have been "a splendid preacher, the chief characteristic of his sermons being directness and brevity. He appears to have had the happy knack of seizing upon some particular thought of religious duty. When he had exhibited it and presented it clearly to his audience, he made his bow and retired."

Now, it would not be an unfair comment upon this estimate of Canon Sheehan as a young preacher, or at least upon the moral that seems to be latent in it, to point out the obvious danger

[1] Heuser, *Canon Sheehan of Doneraile* (1917), p. 54.

of generalization. "Go thou and do likewise" is a counsel of perfection that does not necessarily follow. For the author of the wonderfully attractive novels of clerical life, of the fervid poetic commentary on the *Magnificat,* and of the neatly compressed series of thoughts and meditations comprised in *Under the Cedars and the Stars*—such a man is rather an exception than a type. He was a richly gifted soul as well as an assiduous literary craftsman. He was also a zealous and devoted priest. He knew that directness and brevity were highly desirable, and he was willing to go through an arduous apprenticeship in the art of achieving these excellent qualities of discourse. Doubtless, also, he had the power, whether as a natural gift or as a laborious acquisition, to make his presentation of a thought not merely direct and brief, but striking and attractive as well. *Quod licet Jovi non licet bovi,* we are tempted to exclaim.

Such a guarded comment as this would not, at first blush, appear unfair. We may reasonably hesitate to urge it, nevertheless, when we find a wholly different—say, rather, a wholly opposite—type of priest illustrating the same rare qualities in his sermons. Pastor Halloft was not a literary man. He was not an orator, but "a plain, blunt man." He had nothing of the subtle art credited to Marc Antony by

Shakespeare. Without any of the elegant simplicity that characterizes the speech of Brutus in *Julius Caesar,* he had that patriot's kindling zeal, downright courage and forthright utterance. Speaking to an audience of exceedingly plain, blunt people, he managed somehow to secure directness and brevity. He was a pioneer in a waste place of God's kingdom, and (says [2] his biographer) "it gave him but little anxiety that there should be only a few persons at the Mass on Sunday morning, which he celebrated with as much solemnity as the place and circumstances allowed. He laid great stress on the sermon. It was for the most part short, but he injected into it a touch of enthusiasm which made the little group present see that he was interested in them. They felt their own importance as pioneers, as well as the importance of the act at which they assisted. He meant them to advertise the sermons; for he would preach again in the evening." His brevity here seems to have been intended as a bait to catch the larger fish that had failed to enter his net. Or it was like the bell which St. Francis Xavier rang in the streets of Goa to gather first the little children and, through them, the larger folk later on. Whether or not his ser-

[2] Anon., *Pastor Halloft—A Story of Clerical Life* (1918), p. 26.

mons to the evening congregations were longer, we are not told by his biographer. We may fairly surmise that they were equally direct, if perchance a trifle longer.

At all events, Canon Sheehan and Pastor Halloft are witnesses of very diverse characteristics. And their testimony agrees as to the desirability of short sermons.

The pulpit has thus spoken. Let us now hear the pew. How do our congregations regard the short sermon? Another, and possibly a more pertinent, inquiry would be, Why do they so regard them? Both questions are answered[3] promptly enough, and by a layman: "The great secret of success in preaching is to make the sermon short, always short, very short; as a rule not more than fifteen or twenty minutes, including notices, Epistle and Gospel. The reasons for this are many and most important. In the first place, for many persons, no matter how devout they are, the time at their disposal is very limited on account of many circumstances beyond their control; secondly, in a sermon carefully prepared, and concisely expressed, as much can be said, and much better understood, in fifteen minutes than if the same were said in the course of an hour; third, but

[3] Markoe, *Impressions of a Layman* (St. Paul, Minn., 1909), p. 136.

few persons can keep their attention fixed upon a sermon beyond fifteen minutes, and, although some of those who read this may not be flattered by the statement, not one preacher in a hundred can hold the attention of his hearers more than fifteen minutes, and not one in a thousand can hold an audience more than half an hour; and a most earnest priest may be filled with holy zeal and so carried away with his subject as to forget the passing of time and everything else; but, alas for human frailty, in such cases, almost invariably, the effect upon his hearers is simply to tire them and make them forget what he has said, while the same sermon condensed into ten or fifteen minutes would have been remembered and productive of much good. Short sermons is a perfectly safe rule, while long ones may be time and energy entirely lost upon the audience." Thus does a layman, Mr. Ralston J. Markoe, discourse on sermonizing from the standpoint—or sit-point—of the pew. The son of an Episcopalian minister who had been converted to Catholicism, he may perhaps be considered an unusually well-qualified commentator on sermons.

Brevity may be the true driving-power of a sermon, as it is said to be the soul of wit. Perhaps we shall more readily admit this, if we understand "wit" in the proverb as referring,

not to drollery or banter or facetiousness or even pleasantry, but rather to the power of comprehending and judging and concisely expressing a matured judgment; in brief, that brilliant intellectuality which the poet had in view when he declared that "Great wits are sure to madness near allied."

2

The examples cited from the story of two practitioners of the art of preaching, namely Father Sheehan and Pastor Halloft, are supported by the repeated counsels of professors of the art.

St. Francis Borgia, in his brief treatise on the method of preaching, makes room for the warning that a long sermon does not benefit the hearers, but rather wearies and disgusts them (Chapter VII).

St. Francis de Sales, in his Letter on Preaching,[4] warns the Archbishop of Bourges: "It is always better that the sermon be short rather than long. In this point I have failed up to the present, but I am correcting myself." And the Bishop of Belley, unconsciously illustrating the Saint's counsel, tells[5] us of the incident in the

[4] "A Letter on Preaching" (tr. Boyle), p. 70 of *Instructions on Preaching.*

[5] *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales* (tr. Anon.), p. 349.

Cathedral of Annecy when the Saint's words effected a wonderful operation of grace in the soul of a man who had been on the verge of becoming a heretic. "The sermon was short, and soon came to an end"—that was the declaration of St. Francis himself. "Francis greatly approved," says Bishop Camus in another place,[6] "of short sermons, saying that lengthiness is the great fault of preachers in our day." On one occasion, he asked the Saint: "Do you call that a fault, or liken over-abundance to starvation?" and received the pungent reply: "That vine makes most wood which bears least fruit. A multitude of words has but little result. Look at the homilies of the Fathers, how short they mostly are, and how far more useful than our sermons."

The Bishop of Belley adds his own opinion: "A little well said and earnestly inculcated is the most effectual kind of preaching," and apparently believed that the frequent though brief repetition of great truths was more profitable than a rare but lengthy demonstration of them. In support of this view, he again quotes St. Francis: "He who would work iron must hammer at it over and over again, and the painter is never weary of touching up his canvas. How

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[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 347.

much more patient repetition is needed to impress eternal truth upon dull brains and hearts hardened in sin!"

The method of preaching drawn up by M. Almeras for the Congregation of the Mission after the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, repeats [7] the lesson of brevity: "One should avoid prolixity with great care, as it only wearies and confuses the poor people, who, being disgusted thereby, at the end of the sermon profit less by all that was said before."

Bishop Dupanloup also called attention to the danger of fatiguing the people by long sermons. Fatigue produces listlessness, and what is heard by the ear is not noted by the mind. As his work on pastoral preaching abundantly testifies,[8] Dupanloup was a most ardent admirer of the homiletic principles and practice of Fénelon. He might have quoted him in this connection, for Fénelon, in his third dialogue [9] on pulpit eloquence, inculcates the same lesson of brevity.

The traditional counsel of brevity is neatly put by Father McGinnes [10] in his *Ministry of the Word:* "Don't weary the people by long sermons. Their power of attention flags after

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[7] *Instructions on Preaching* (tr. Boyle), p. 86.
[8] Dupanloup, *The Ministry of Preaching* (tr. Eales), pp. 143-187.
[9] *Three Dialogues on Pulpit Eloquence* (tr. Eales), p. 156.
[10] P. 81.

a certain time. Knowing what you are going to say, begin soon to say it. Some preachers by their long-winded introductions have the patience of their hearers wearied out before they reach their subject. Having said what you had to say, in a few forcible practical sentences urge it as a whole upon the attention of your hearers."

3

Why should a sermon be short? Amid the many counsels of brevity, we hear an occasional reason alleged.

Mr. Ralston Markoe argues that the sermon should be short because: 1. Many persons can spend but little time in church; 2. Few can keep their attention fixed for more than fifteen minutes; 3. When fatigued, they forget what has been said and will not note what remains to be said; 4. A carefully concise style will say as much as an untrimmed, diffuse one.

To the obvious danger of boring the congregation, Mullois [11] adds the consideration: "We speak in God's name. . . . The instructions of our Blessed Lord, who is the Divine Master of us all, were uniformly short. Even the Sermon

[11] Mullois, *The Clergy and the Pulpit* (tr. Badger), pp. 183-196.

on the Mount, which has revolutionized the world, does not appear to have lasted more than half an hour." With shrewd insight into human weakness, he warns us against the kindly-meant flattery of the people: "For the most part, we are all convinced that others speak too long, but we are beguiled by the world's flattery. We preach, and people are delighted, and send intimations to us that we have acquitted ourselves to admiration; that they would gladly have listened to us much longer, and so forth. But we know better than any one else that the world does not always speak the truth, and that we ourselves have frequently denounced its want of sincerity. How comes it, then, that we are deluded by such fine speeches? In flattering us, the world simply plies its trade; but it is our duty not to give heed to its blandishments. . . . A man of high intellectual attainments, recently converted, declared that the manner in which he was bored by sermons during his youth, had kept him from listening to them for twenty years."

The Anglican Dean Howson [12] has other valid reasons for counseling a short sermon: "Our customary morning service is extremely long," he declares. Relatively—as the usual small at-

[12] Contributed to Ellicott's *Homiletical and Pastoral Lectures*, p. 53.

tendance might convince ourselves—our customary High Mass is long, or is considered long. "And again," continues the Dean, "the fashion and taste of the day point to short compositions as those which are on the whole preferred." He illustrates this prevailing taste: "The rapidly read article in the newspaper, the hasty essay covering only two or three pages in the magazine, form a strong contrast to the long and laboriously written books of the older time, which are on the shelves of our libraries. Our sermons must, of course, feel the influence of the prevalent habit of the times; and we ought carefully to acquire the power of delivering, on suitable occasions, short pointed addresses from the pulpit."

4

We have listened to much consentient praise of the Short Sermon. But what should be considered its appropriate limits of time?

"We have occupied four days in explaining to you the parable of Lazarus, bringing out the treasure that we found in a body covered with sores; a treasure, not of gold and silver and precious stones, but of wisdom and fortitude, of patience and endurance." Thus does St. Chrysostom begin his sermon on the topic

of excessive grief at the loss of friends. He declares that it would be appropriate to continue his exposition on the death of Lazarus, but that, in order "to avoid wearying you," he would reserve further remarks upon that subject until another time. How long did it take him to deliver his present sermon? The English translation from which a quotation has just been made comprises about five thousand words. Preachers vary much in the rapidity of their utterance, but a fair estimate would probably assign about forty minutes to the discourse. Should this be considered long or short? Even for such exceptional occasions as the panegyric of the titular saint of a church, the dedication of a church, the installation of a bishop, and the like, forty minutes would not err on the side of brevity.

"Look at the homilies of the Fathers," said St. Francis de Sales, "how short they mostly are, and how far more useful than our sermons." Allowing for the greater lengthiness of the Greeks than the Latins in homiletic discourse, four days spent on a partial exposition of the death of Lazarus would, in our day, probably weary an audience. And yet Msgr. Benson delivered twenty-four sermons, if I mistake not, on the single text: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Perhaps we should not

measure length by the clock or the tape-measure?

We have found three estimates for the sermon-length: St. Francis Borgia, one hour; M. Almeras, one hour for Sundays, three quarters of an hour for work-days; St. Francis de Sales, three quarters of an hour—if the sermonizer be interesting—or, better still, one-half hour. St. Alphonsus Liguori [13] offers all three: Lent sermons, one hour; Sunday sermons, three quarters of an hour; the parochial instruction, one-half hour. Bishop Dupanloup favors a straight half-hour for the ordinary sermon: *"À l'exception des grands sermons, dans de rares occasions, une demi-heure suffit largement: au delà l'auditoire se fatigue et n'écoute pas, la vie n'est plus. D'ailleurs que de choses ne peut-on pas dire dans une demi-heure, quand on sait serrer sa parole, et éviter les inutilités."* If the preacher takes care to prune his discourse, he can indeed say a great deal within the suggested limits of time.

The half-hour discourse has many supporters. Potter [14] refers to "the half hour which an ordinary discourse should not exceed." Eales quotes the Rev. Mr. Bushnell, who declares that

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[13] In "Instructions to Preachers" (p. 14) prefixed to *Sermons for all the Sundays of the Year* (tr. Callan).

[14] *Sacred Eloquence*, Chapter IV, Sect. iv.

"for ordinary preaching thirty or thirty-five minutes of carefully-arranged thought is more effective than more time. A certain mission-preacher, after preaching an hour and a half, expressed great surprise because the people were not moved to decision and action. The pastor with whom he was laboring said, 'Make three sermons during the time occupied in preaching this one, and you will make three times as many converts.' Devotion ends where weariness begins." It is interesting to know that even Protestant preachers, in whose view the sermon is the principal part of religious functions, agree with this limit. Thus, too, Kelman, in his *The War and Preaching*[15] declares that one-half of an hour, twice on Sundays, is about all that a congregation can bear. St. Ambrose is said to have taken the average length of thirty minutes. Mullois estimates that Our Saviour took about the same amount of time for the Sermon on the Mount. Is, then, the half-hour sermon (understood as including a few announcements) to be properly described as "short"?

It is clear that the universal trend in our day is toward brevity in sermons. It is equally clear that brevity is a relative matter. Merely

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[15] (1919) p. 16.

to quote the counsel "Be brief" is hardly concrete and satisfactory. To men of an older generation, forty minutes was a short time in which to deliver a message of the Gospel.

We accordingly read with approval but without a sense of definiteness such remarks as the following: "According to the Council of Trent, a discourse should have two qualities, namely brevity and simplicity. It should be brief and it should be intelligible—*brevis et facilis*—not tedious and long-drawn-out on the one hand, nor too elaborate and ornate on the other, but marked by a noble simplicity, skilfully adjusted to the capacity of one's hearers, and made sharper than a two-edged sword by diligent study and earnest thought." What limits of time shall mark the sermon that is "not tedious and long-drawn-out"? [16]

We read with similar approval and similar hesitancy the fine advice given by St. Francis of Assisi to his preachers: "I also warn and exhort the same brothers that in the preaching they do, their words be fire-tried and pure for the utility and edification of the people, announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity of speech because the Lord made His word short upon earth."

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[16] O'Donnell, *The Priest of To-day and His Duties*, p. 220.

The counsel is echoed by Valuy:[17] "In writing sermons your rule should be 'short and good.' Not everything that we eat, but only that which we digest, keeps up the vital warmth of our bodies." But the comforting definiteness we are looking for is as yet lacking.

We find at length, however, what we have desired: "Except on extraordinary occasions, a sermon should not be lengthy. A discourse occupying from twenty to thirty minutes, if judiciously prepared, will contain abundant matter to instruct and edify without fatiguing the congregation. A surfeit of spiritual, as well as of corporal, food is hurtful to those who partake of it."[18] Twenty to thirty minutes.

5

The twenty-minute sermon has its strong advocates. "If," writes Dean Howson, "I were required to spend an hour on two Sunday sermons, I should not divide the time into two equal parts, but should be disposed to preach twenty minutes in the morning, and forty in the evening. Our evening congregations consist largely of those who, after a short service, are rather glad to have a long sermon, and can listen to

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[17] *Directorium Sacerdotale. A Guide for Priests*, p. 134.
[18] Cardinal Gibbons, *The Ambassador of Christ*, p. 283.

it easily. The morning sermons are preached, as I have said, under different conditions, and our more highly educated people, too, who are then at church, are impatient of prolixity."

All of Hitchcock's brief manual is devoted to expounding and illustrating his plan for the composition of a sermon. He is nothing if not specific and concrete, and accordingly so measures the space to be given to each portion of the plan as to assure [19] that "a sermon of this length will occupy about twenty minutes in delivery."

The "half-hour sermon," with announcements, etc. included, is virtually reduced to twenty minutes, and this appears to be the customary length to-day.

There are nevertheless those who advocate a still shorter sermon. Mullois tells us (p. 190) that in his day there were parishes in Paris where a rule prevailed that no one should preach more than forty minutes. "In some popular meetings," he added, "preachers are not allowed to speak beyond fifteen minutes, and *it is there that the most good is done.*" The importance of this testimony solicits the italics which we have ventured to confer upon it.

Our layman, Mr. Ralston Markoe, pleads for

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[19] *Sermon Composition*, p. 19.

a sermon of "not more than fifteen or twenty minutes, including notices, Epistle and Gospel," and later alludes thrice to the advantages of a fifteen-minute discourse, concluding with a still further abatement of his original "twenty" into "ten or fifteen minutes." He seems unconsciously to follow the advice of Baron Alderson,[20] who, when asked as to the proper length of a sermon, answered, "twenty minutes, with a leaning to the side of mercy."

6

How to achieve brevity? It is partly a gift of nature, partly an acquisition of art. But art can do much. First of all, it can remove irrelevancies. In the flush of composition, we are apt to write amplifications of thought that are quite unnecessary, illustrations that fatigue at length by their overabundance, commonplaces of thought that are futile for our purpose. Robert Louis Stevenson objects to such additions, for a peculiar reason: "To add irrelevant matter is not to lengthen but to *bury*." The kernel of thought is hidden in the shell. Remove the shell and people will find the kernel. Incidentally, brevity is achieved. Michelangelo beautifully describes the process:

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[20] Hoppin, *Homiletics* (rev. ed., 1883), p. 275.

The more the marble wastes,
The more the statue grows.

Again, the language of our essential thought may be condensed by art. Southey, when he declared that "if you would be pungent, be brief," assumed that brevity was at the command of the conscientious writer. "It is with words as with sunbeams," he said; "the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn." It might seem curious to reflect that the process involves the use of a magnifying glass. Even so—for in condensing the language, you really magnify the essential thought.

Finally, clearly defined purpose in the sermon, a well-arranged order of exposition, a fairly rapid plunge *in medias res* and a snappy conclusion will assist wonderfully in achieving the brevity so desirable in sermons.

III

THE MINIATURE SERMON

WHEN Abraham pleaded for Sodom, he began with an assumption of fifty just men in the city. By successive whittlings of the number, he finally arrived at ten.

The twenty minutes conceded by a modern layman[1] to an ordinary Sunday sermon were finally whittled down to ten.

The Abbé Mullois, noting[2] that the people are easily impressed and love to be moved by an appealing address, but soon forget the emotion they have experienced, argues that "in order to bring them back to the church, we must have sermons of ten, seven, and even of five minutes' duration. The Mass and the sermon together should not exceed half-an-hour." He is obviously speaking of the Low Mass, and accordingly begins where the other homiletic critics leave off—at the figure ten.

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[1] Markoe, *Impressions of a Layman*, p. 136. Cf. "The Short Sermon" in *The American Ecclesiastical Review* for March, 1922.

[2] Mullois, *The Clergy and the Pulpit*, p. 190.

"This plan has been attempted," he says. "The experiment was made, and produced the most happy and unexpected results. Intelligent and zealous pastors, distressed at seeing that the greater part of their flock scarcely ever heard the word of God or went to church, established a low Mass, announced as specially designed for the men, with a lecture of from ten to five minutes' duration every Sunday. . . . Crowds flocked to the church, which was sometimes found too small to hold them. Nor was this all: many attended high Mass also, and even went to the confessional; which they had not done, some for twenty, some for thirty, and some for forty years."

He meets the natural objection, "What can be said in ten or seven minutes?" His argument might have rested itself on the happy results he had previously chronicled. What matters it whether much is said or not, provided much be accomplished? But he does argue the point, declaring that much more can be said in such a brief time than is generally thought, "when due preparation is made, when we have a good knowledge of mankind, and are well versed in religious matters. . . . Have not a few words often sufficed to revolutionize multitudes, and to produce an immense impression?"

When Canon Sheehan was a young priest,

his first sermon at Exeter evidently produced such an impression. "He appears," said [3] one of his successors in the curacy there, "to have had the happy knack of seizing upon some particular thought of religious duty. When he had exhibited it and presented it clearly to his audience, he made his bow and retired. They remembered in particular his first sermon. It was on charity; very short, hardly five minutes, it would seem. Yet close on forty years afterward its general outline was almost verbally reproduced by an unlettered woman of eighty-eight, who had heard him deliver it." Apparently, much can indeed be said in five minutes, if the preacher has the "knack" or art to move with ease and certainty within a narrow plot of ground. With splendid argumentation, Wordsworth, in more than one sonnet, pleaded [4] for a more genial appreciation of that highly restricted poetical form. He could say much in fourteen pentameter lines.

A similar testimony is given [5] by Mr. Ralston Markoe: "Some of the best sermons that

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[3] Heuser, *Canon Sheehan of Doneraile*, p. 54.

[4] His sonnet beginning with the words, "Scorn not the sonnet," is a marvel of condensation and of felicitous characterization both of the poets who have employed this form of verse and of the peculiar manner in which they used it. He illustrates the fact that much can be said in a few words, albeit in an unalterable mould of rhythm and rhyme.

[5] *Op. cit.*, p. 137.

'Layman' has ever read were prepared for a Low Mass and were limited to five minutes' time."

Mullois, however, advocated the popular discourse of seven minutes' duration: "In fifteen weeks," he argues, "with a sermon of seven minutes every Sunday, one might give a complete course of religious instruction, if the sermons were well digested beforehand." He appends a foot-note here: "We have chosen the seven minutes' sermon, because experience has taught us that it attracts the greatest numbers." His appeal to experience may be based on personal or local facts, but it is valuable nevertheless.

The argument *ab esse ad posse* is strengthened by the volumes of the Paulists containing a very large number of "Five Minute Sermons." Further strength is found in the wide practice of having such short sermons at low Masses.

In his advocacy of a seven-minutes' sermon, however, Mullois finds a critic in Hood,[6] who comments thus: "This is certainly, to speak in paradox, carrying brevity to its utmost extent." The critic was apparently not aware of the five-minutes' sermon.

What can be said in five minutes? Much,

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[6] Hood, *The Throne of Eloquence* (Ed. New York, 1888, p. 366).

indeed. The proverbial wisdom of mankind is condensed into extremely short sentences. Facts, too, can oft be summarized briefly and withal brilliantly. Perry's dispatch, "We have met the enemy, and they are ours," was long-winded in comparison with Caesar's *Veni, vidi, vici.*

A sermon, however, is not a statement of facts merely, but as well an argumentation thereon, a persuasive application of the inference or moral, an earnest appeal to make the application firm and constant. And so a sermon is naturally longer than a simple statement of facts.

There are occasions, nevertheless, when it may be short and telling. Dean Swift, preaching on the duty of almsgiving, read the text, "He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord," and his whole discourse—exordium, body and peroration—was comprised in the words: "Brethren, if you are satisfied with the security, come down with the cash!"

Massillon might well have achieved a like telling brevity in his funeral oration over Louis ("the Great"), if, having broken the awe-inspiring silence of the vast congregation with the simple words, "Brethren, only GOD is great!", he had forthwith retired from the pulpit.

In the Preamble of his *Texts for Talkers,* Fowler declares his difficulty lay in "gelatinizing" his thoughts into texts, and continues: "What was at first a half-dozen pages, I have had to distil into a half-dozen lines."

Obviously, the thing can be done. It can be done, argues Mullois,[7] without the least injury to the sermon: "Lop off all commonplace considerations from the exordium, all useless discussions from the body of the discourse, and all vague phrases from the peroration. Prune away all redundant words, all parasitical epithets, using only those that triple the force of the substantive. Be chary of words and phrases; economize them as a miser does his crown pieces."

Conciseness will be the obvious need of a sermon in miniature. The process of lopping off and pruning is neither pleasant nor easy, however; and it supposes both art and energy, both science and patience. For there is always lurking in the background the warning of Horace, *Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio.* We must be clear, clear at any cost.

The essential of clearness suggests two requisites in the composition. The first is that "happy knack" credited to the young curate at

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[7] *Op. cit.,* p. 189.

Exeter,[8] "of seizing upon some particular thought of religious duty." *Particular*—literally, *part* of a more general treatment. *Specific,* not general. Cardinal Newman criticized certain French sermons on the ground that they, in effect, comprised as many discourses as there were points in the division. The skeleton of the miniature sermon should exhibit divisions, indeed, but these should not be coördinated thoughts but rather phases of a single thought, like Browning's star, that could dart "now a ray of red, now a ray of blue."

The second essential is the skeleton just alluded to; for the sermon should not be amorphous, however diminutive it be. As the sermon grows smaller in bulk, it should grow clearer in outline, more crystalline in structure. Like a sonnet, the sermonette should be "a little picture painted well."[9]

Now there is clearly a danger here that the preacher, having only a few minutes at his dis-

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[8] Heuser, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[9] Richard Watson Gilder's sonnet on "What is a Sonnet?" Answering the same question, M. Montagu contends that any subject may be chosen, but that the limitations of the song require that there should be just one clear thought:

> "The subject any; but, whate'er it be,
> In one full thought, clear-claused, and blemish-free,
> With a beginning, middle, and an end."

Even the poet must have a plan, a definite beginning, middle, end.

posal, may be tempted to "fill in" the time with *talk*—rambling, disconnected, extempore talk. If he yield to the temptation, it will be because he sadly misconceives the nature of the task set before him. The fewer the moments, the more precious they are. "Be chary of words and phrases," M. Mullois well advises; "economize them as a miser does his crown pieces." Who can do this without most careful preparation? The despised sonneteer labors meticulously at the verbal cameo under his hand, and even if the product of his poetic pains be in itself of little worth, he himself is benefited by the training in artistic condensation. It would indeed be an unpleasant experience to find a man zealously pouring water into a sieve. But, as a philosopher once remarked, it would be sadder still, to find a man spending his time merely in ridiculing the sieve-pourer.

The sermonette needs preparatory work, and plenty of it. For the sermon which is brief may nevertheless be tedious. "How did you like my sermon?" the Bishop of Oxford once asked George Canning, the famous orator and statesman. "I thought it was short," Canning replied. "I am aware it was short," the Bishop said, "but I was afraid of being tedious." Whereupon Canning bluntly replied, "But you were *tedious,* you *were* tedious."

The delivery of the miniature sermon should be a matter of special concern. The three essentials of oratory declared by Demosthenes are here of supreme importance. There must be action, action, action—not merely gestures (in the narrower interpretation sometimes put upon that word), but the emphatic language of pose, bodily movement, voice, eye. And there must be, throughout, that tone of the voice which is called earnestness, or the accent of conviction. Truth must be made to sound like truth. "How comes it," a preacher once asked Betterton, the actor, "that people are so much more interested in plays than in sermons?" "Because," he replied, "the preacher makes truth appear like fiction, whereas the actor makes fiction appear like truth." Accordingly, a formal manner, such as is often employed in reading the parish announcements, or a listless manner, suggesting the idea of perfunctoriness, would be fatal to interest and conviction alike.

Meanwhile, there is the danger of a too rapid enunciation. The preacher perhaps has not found sufficient leisure to write a short sermon, and he is tempted to rush through the longer one. Even if his enunciation be adequately distinct and fairly loud, he should reflect that ordinary folk rarely possess agile intelligences. Rapidity stupefies rather than stimulates. Time

should be allowed for the thought to percolate through sometimes dense strata of ignorance, dulness, misapprehension.

Finally, whether the sermons in miniature be of the five-minutes made famous by the Paulists, of the seven-minutes advocated by the Abbé Mullois, or of the eight-minutes illustrated recently by an American priest,[10] we might give attention to the impressive counsel of M. Mullois: "If, then, you wish to be successful, in the first place fix the length of your sermon, and never go beyond the time, be inflexible on that score. Should you exceed it, apologize to your audience for so doing, and prove in the pulpit of truth that you can be faithful to your word."

The sermons in miniature are obviously appropriate for the Low Masses. Time presses in our large parishes; for it is consumed in the merely physical process of emptying the church of one large crowd and filling it with another, as well as in the necessary announcements

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10 Demouy, *Eight Minute Sermons* (New York, 1918). The sermons vary much in length; e.g., the first sermon contains about 1000 words; the second, 1100; the fourth, 1500. Similarly, O'Keeffe's *Sermons in Miniature for Meditation* (New York, 1919) assigns to "The Pearl Merchant" a page and a half, still less to "The Two Sons," but more than twelve pages to "Christ's Resurrection and Our Immortal Bodies." The sermons are, however, definitely suggested for "Meditation," not for preaching.

(obscured at times by the injection of much unnecessary announcement) of parish details. Time presses, indeed; but the people need instruction, advice, exhortation. And there is open to the zealous priest both an obligation and an opportunity to employ, with careful art, the resources of the sermon in miniature.

IV

PLAIN SERMONS

WHAT is a "plain" sermon? The word in question is, of course, relative. It must take account of the auditory. Argumentation and verbal affluence that are quite plain to an ecclesiastical synod might well seem to even a cultivated city congregation like the surly estimate formed by Casca of Cicero's harangue:

> *Cassius.*—Did Cicero say anything?
> *Casca.*—Ay, he spoke Greek.
> *Cassius.*—To what effect?
> *Casca.*—Nay an I tell you that I'll ne'er look you in the face again: but those that understood him smiled at one another, and shook their heads: but, for mine own part, it was Greek to me.

A sermon may be as Greek to the congregation for various reasons. The subject-matter may be speculatively profound and quite beyond the caption of intelligences not specifically trained for such considerations. Or the theme and the argument may normally be within the reach of the auditory, but the preacher may be inept in handling either or both. Or, finally,

albeit both the theme and the argument are simple enough, the preacher may use too many unfamiliar words.

The sensible preacher needs no warning against the use of intricate and technical argumentation. The honest preacher will take the trouble to make both theme and argument as clear as possible. There remains for our present consideration, then, only the third reason why sermons are preached in Greek, namely, because of the abundance of unfamiliar words they contain.

"Unfamiliar"—to whom? To an ecclesiastical synod, to the graduation class of a classical university, to a cultivated city congregation, to a humble rural gathering? Again, of course, plainness is relative. But if we take a medium group, an ordinary city congregation (comprising professional men, tradesmen, artisans, learned and unlearned, quick in understanding and slow, widely and poorly read), we may find illustrations of questionable plainness in homiletic vocabulary.

Presumably it was for such a congregation that Bishop Bellord prepared his sermon on "The Nature of Hell," which is printed in *Plain Sermons for Practical Preachers*.[1] In the fol-

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[1] Vol. I, pp. 21–30 (New York, 1916).

lowing extracts from it, the words which may be quite unfamiliar to many in the auditory are underlined:

> Some have *interpreted* these [Scriptural] *expressions* too *literally*. . . . To picture hell as a real volcano, or a lake of real fire, would make it too *objective* . . . the idea that hell is the immediate outcome and growth from sin, and even *identical* with sin, would be lost. We should lose sight of the fact that the kind and *degree* of suffering is exactly adapted to each man's sins and his *precise* measure of guilt. . . . We must remember, then, that the *expressions* of Holy Scripture are to a considerable extent *figurative*, that the torments are in great measure *subjective*, within the sinner's self, and that the chief *element* in the true idea of hell is not the fire but the loss of God.

This is from one paragraph. Other unfamiliar words in the sermon are: *inadequate, materialistic, abstract, Moloch, Astarte, ruthless, symbol, extinction, duration, tenet, primary,*[2] *incipient, irreparable, mitigation, essence, involves, positive,*[3] *negation, transcend-*

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[2] "Primary," if understood at all, would probably be associated in the minds of American parents with the lowest grade in education. The Bishop uses it in the sense of first in importance: "The primary thing in the sufferings of hell is the pain of loss, *pœna damni*, a damnation properly so called." In this excerpt I correct an obvious misprint, placing "pain of loss" for the printed "pain and loss."

[3] "Positive" would hardly convey to ordinary minds any other connotation than that which is associated with the Americanism "pos-i-tive-ly"! It occurs in the sentence: "For evil is not a positive created thing, but a negation, the absence of good."

ent, harmony,[4] *intellectual, physical,*[5] *self,*[6] *aptitude, void, insatiable, repulsion, faculty, privation, consciousness, impotence, essential, imperishable, subordination, source, sensual impulses, immaterial, arrogance, lineaments, intensity, functions, obscuring, baffled, indefinitely, anticipation, magnifies, unendurable, determine,*[7] *ultimate, conscious, participation, enormity, incredible, transitory,* etc.

Is it hypercritical to select such words as these for the category of "unfamiliar" words? Many of them are in commonest use. It is probable, nevertheless, that only the vaguest concept attaches to them in the minds of perhaps the majority of the congregation. An instructor in English in a preparatory seminary (ecclesiastical) once told me that he found it almost impossible to select words which should both express his mind to his pupils and be withal understood by them.[8] Presumably, such

[4] "Harmony" would suggest a musical performance almost exclusively. It occurs in the sentence: "God is Order, i. e., harmony and perfection, the condition of all goodness, beauty, virtue, enjoyment."

[5] "Physical" occurs in the phrase: "disorder intellectual and disorder physical." What idea would "physical" convey to the ordinary mind?

[6] "Self" occurs thus: "the self is not complete when alone and without God."

[7] "Determine" occurs thus: "determine by our deeds the direction," etc.

[8] The instructor was much put out by his difficulty. "Many of the boys," he said, "seem to have read hardly any literature. They don't understand the commonest words."

students have had a better education than the "average" member of even a city congregation. They would have some vague notion of the meaning, of course, or would clearly grasp the meaning of some words in the list. Could the Bishop have expressed his thought more clearly by the use of more familiar words? The question is difficult. It concerns neither the sesquipedalian character nor the Latin or Greek derivation of the words. Short words may often be unfamiliar ones. The Anglo-Saxon elements of our tongue might baffle at times the efforts of cultivated people to understand them. Who, then, shall determine for us which words may properly be considered unfamiliar to many in the congregations?

Instead of trying to answer the question, let me simply place here another paragraph taken from the same sermon. I venture to think that, although it has many long words, many words of Latin derivation, its thought would be clear to all in the congregation:

> This suffering is indicated by the word of Abraham to Dives in the parable: "Son, remember." And what is the sinner to remember? That he has lost God, that he has lost all things, all good, all happiness and for all eternity. That he has lost God for so little. What has he gained? A little honor, a little revenge, a little satisfaction, a little wealth, which has slipped through his hands, and is as if it had

never been. That he has spent so much valuable time, so much energy on such worthless things—time and energy enough, differently applied, to have purchased eternal happiness. That it was so easy to have saved his soul; so little was demanded by God in the way of prayer, endurance, mortification, as compared with the horrible woe of hell: grace was so abundant, God so ready to help him. So many others whom he knew, and perhaps despised, have saved their souls, and he with all his wisdom has committed the grossest folly.

If we compare the two quoted paragraphs, we shall sense their different stylistic quality in respect of plainness or easy intelligibility. Let us take one word of the latter paragraph, "happiness." The preacher might have used "felicity" instead—and undoubtedly some preachers would have done so, under the conviction that "felicity" is somehow more elegant. In his *Life of Robert Hall,* Foster confesses that in one of his interviews with Hall, he used the word "felicity" three or four times in quick succession. "Why," asked Hall, "do you say 'felicity,' sir? Happiness is a better word, more musical and genuine English—coming from the Saxon."

Again, one admires the beautiful simplicity of the sentence in the quoted paragraph: "That he has lost God, that he has lost all things, all good, all happiness and for all eternity." I

recall having listened to a sermon delivered to a large congregation of children. "Remember," said the preacher, "remember, my dear children, that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient." It would not be easy to remember that! In defense of the preacher, however, it should be added that the sermon was largely extemporaneous and that he himself had but recently been ordained, after a course in which Latin had held the position of honor in class for five years. He accordingly thought in theological Latin and spoke in that language naturally. Doubtless, he would now say to such children—"Remember, my dear children, that God is everywhere, that He can do anything, and that He knows everything."

While the quoted paragraph is excellently simple in phrase, it is not above criticism. Its first sentence recalls the word of Abraham to "Dives." The Bishop takes his text, not from the parable, but from Job, and yet seems to think that the congregation will forthwith understand his allusion. It may well be doubted that the people attached any meaning whatsoever to "Dives," for the parable—even should they recall it—would not explain "Dives." It speaks, in its English translation, not of Dives, but of "a certain rich man." Again does our leaning toward Latin, whether in the text book

or in the Bible, manage to obscure our meaning![9]

We are tempted to use technical phraseology, because of our long training in philosophy and theology. We are tempted to use Latin and Greek derivations, because they summarize neatly what otherwise should need many words. All of these foreign locutions are very familiar to us. We do not pause to ask whether possibly they may convey either no meaning at all or else a vague or fragmentary suggestion to the minds of our auditors. A long course in our English Bible would tend to correct this habit. Its figurative language would not obscure our

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[9] A certain class in Church history used a text book in Latin, but had not access to a dictionary of geographical Latin. Some of the students memorized what to them was an unintelligible maze of names. One of these was reciting a section dealing with *Sabaudia*, and his memory worked well, but something in his distribution of emphasis led the professor to ask, in English, "What is *Sabaudia?* A person, a place, or a thing?" "I don't know," confessed the hapless student. Another student in the same class was trying to get at the true inwardness of a chapter headed "*De Columnensibus.*" What did that heading mean? He worked at the question in a fairly scientific manner. Nominative plural, *Columnenses;* singular, *Columnensis;* removing the locatory suffix, *Columna;* English rendering, Column. But the student at this point, having read history independently of his course in the seminary, got a flash of inspiration: Italian, *Colonna!* In these two instances, was the joke on the students, or on the Latin history (which failed to give vernacular equivalents of Latin names), or on the professor (who failed to provide a dictionary for his class or to forearm his pupils, for each lesson, with translations of the geographical names)?

expression of thought but rather tend to make it plain, and its terse simplicity would add charm and real dignity to our discourse.

In his *Philosophy of Rhetoric,* Dr. Campbell shows us how the prosy, matter-of-fact mind might express the thought of Our Lord in St. Luke (12:27, 28):

> Consider the flowers how they gradually increase in size; they do no manner of work, and yet I declare to you that no king whatever, in his most splendid habit, is dressed up like them. If then God, in his providence, doth so adorn the vegetable productions, which continue but a little time on the land, and are afterwards devoted to the meanest uses, how much more will he provide clothing for you?

Contrast this with Challoner's Douay version:

> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these. Now, if God clothe in this manner the grass that is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven: how much more you, O ye of little faith?

We may be inclined to think that Dr. Campbell was trifling. But there is—or once was—a homiletic style that loved to turn the terse into the diffuse, the concrete into the abstract, the metaphorical into the literal. It was seriously illustrated by a posthumous work of Father

Appleton's, entitled *An Analysis or Familiar Explanation of the Gospels*[10] of the Sundays and Feasts. The analysis of the Gospels was to take the form of a familiar explanation. This explanation was of course intended to make plain what was obscure, and the feat was to be achieved through familiar discourse. In his Introduction, Father Appleton declared that he "endeavored, in as few words as possible, to elucidate the genuine meaning, of whatever kind it be, whether historical or moral, of each verse." If we place the words of the Gospel in one column and the explanation in another, we shall the more easily understand the process of simplification "in as few words as possible":

See the fig-tree and all the trees: when they now shoot forth their fruit,	As if he had said: When, in the revolving course of the seasons, you perceive the vegetable creation assuming activity, and the plants of different kinds preparing for their future prod-

[10] The title-page reads: "An Analysis or Familiar Explanation of the Gospels as Read at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the Different Sundays and Festivals throughout the Year. By the Rev. James Appleton, C.A.D., Author of 'Discourses for all the Sundays and Festivals of the Year, on the Various Duties of the Christian Religion,' &c. Dublin: 1853" (488 large pages). There is, of course, much admirable learning in the volume, but its style is too diffuse and too heavy.

you know that summer is nigh.

uce, you are sensible by experience that the time of summer is approaching.

Again:

One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, saith to him: There is a boy here that hath five barley loaves and two fishes; but what are these among so many?

In this pressing emergency, another of the apostles, approaching Jesus Christ, informed him that, among the crowd, he had discovered a boy, who had some few refreshments, apparently brought thither with a view to be disposed of; namely, five barley loaves, and two small fishes. "But what are these," adds the disciple, "among so many" as are present? How disproportioned this short supply to the immense number of mouths, that are to be fed on the occasion?

Then Jesus said: Make the men sit down.

Our Saviour, upon this, bids his disciples apprise the people that he wished them to sit down.

Now, there was much grass in the place.

It happened, fortunately, that on the spot where this crowd was collected there was a sufficiency of herbage to afford them a good seat.

The men, therefore, sat down, in number about five thousand.	The people, then, being arranged, as we find recorded by the other Evangelists, in companies, of from fifty to a hundred each, without further thought, placed themselves orderly on the ground; making, in the whole number, at least five thousand men, without including the women and little children in their company.

The comment upon "there was much grass in the place" reaches the heights of unconscious humor. Other illustrations might be given of the art of evolving the concise into the diffuse, the plain into the lofty, the wholly simple and intelligible into the complicated and the bombastic. Our homilist disliked the terrible directness of the Baptist's cry, "prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths," and accordingly changed it into the polite request, "remove every impediment that may be like to obstruct his passage." He comments on the verse, "And when he drew near, seeing the city, he wept," as follows: "The feelings of nature in such gratifying circumstances, ought rather, one would think, to have inspired Jesus Christ with the emotions of joy, than with the sensa-

tions of grief, so unsuited to the applauses with which the people received him. But the tears of the Son of God were as much at his command as the reflections that produced them; and these latter were widely different from the sentiments of this multitude. His arrival among them had elated them with gladness; while his penetrative eye discovered to him, on the contrary, only causes of sorrow."

It should be added that only the style of Father Appleton is under review here, and not his zeal or learning, both of which are obvious enough in his *Familiar Explanation.*

The second of the two quoted paragraphs of Bishop Bellord's sermon on Hell makes it abundantly clear that he did not use unfamiliar words because of any preference for them, as Father Appleton apparently did, but as the most exact expression at hand of his meaning. He did not love long and hard words for their own sake. On the other hand, had his official duties permitted him greater leisure, he might have used it to reverse the method of Father Appleton. After the fashion of Sacred Writ, he might have changed the abstract into the concrete, the literal into the figurative, the technical into the popular, the unfamiliar into the familiar, the long into the short, the learned into the simple.

We are so accustomed, both from our studies and from our wide and general reading, to a large and ornate, if not exclusively scholarly and technical, vocabulary, that we may fail to appreciate the limited stock of words with which our flock may be familiar and which they find useful and quite sufficient for all their ordinary needs. Neale[11] gives us an interesting and humorous illustration of this:

I was once spending a Sunday in Lent in a country parish, where the clergyman was of the old school, and not a bad specimen of it. In the morning, he requested me to preach, with a special injunction to be as plain and simple as possible, "because," said he, "my people are very ignorant, and require the most elementary teaching." Accordingly, I endeavored to comply with his wishes, and hoped that, in some degree, I had succeeded. "It was not so bad," said my friend, as we walked home from church, "but still not quite so plain as I could have wished. If you will listen to me in the afternoon, I will endeavor to show you the way in which I think that such a congregation ought to be addressed." After such an invitation, when the worthy rector ascended the pulpit, I was—as the saying is—all attention, and heard him begin, nearly word for word, in the following manner: "To those who will consider the harmony which reigns in the various accounts dictated by inspiration of Christ's Passion, confirmed as those accounts are by the antecedent testimonies of Prophets on the one hand, and by the concurrent testimonies

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[11] Neale, *Mediæval Preachers and Mediæval Preaching*, Introduction, page lxiv.

of the Epistles on the other, it will appear in the highest degree probable, that our Blessed Lord was not an impostor, but was, in reality, what He gave Himself out to be, the Son of God."

Neale does not give this as an illustration of pompous phraseology, but it serves that purpose very well. "My people are very ignorant," the preacher had warned Dr. Neale, "and require the most elementary teaching." Neale takes care to say that it was a country parish, and we may fairly assume that the folk there required teaching that should be elementary in manner as well as in matter. The sermon to such should be, the rector enjoined, as plain and simple as possible!

Sydney Smith reviewed Dr. Parr's "Spital Sermon" in characteristic fashion. Amongst other things, he speaks of the heavy style of the sermon:

> The Doctor is never simple and natural for a single instant. Everything smells of the rhetorician. He never appears to forget himself, or to be hurried by his subject into obvious language. Every expression seems to be the result of artifice and intention. . . . Dr. Parr seems to think that eloquence consists not in an exuberance of beautiful images—not in simple and sublime conceptions—not in the feelings of the passions; but in a studious arrangement of *sonorous, exotic, and sesquipedal words* [the italics are Sydney Smith's]; a very ancient error, which corrupts the style of young, and wearies the patience of sensible men.

The reviewer gives instances, and among them the "intrusion of a technical word into a pathetic description" which "renders the whole passage almost ludicrous." I omit these, as I desire space for a long but beautiful quotation from Ruskin,[12] who wishes that the preacher's words may be simple (even when they are sweetest), and the place from which he speaks like a marble rock in the desert, about which the people have gathered in their thirst." Whilst we delight in his thought, we may withal find leisure to remark his own simplicity of language:

> There are two ways of regarding a sermon, either as a *human composition* or a *divine message*. If we look upon it entirely as the first, and require our clergymen to finish it with their outmost care and learning (for our better delight, whether of ear or intellect), we shall necessarily be led to expect much formality and stateliness in its delivery; and to think all is not well if the pulpit be not ornate, and the sermon written in a black book, to be smoothed upon a cushion in a majestic manner; and consider the treatise thus prepared as something which it is our business to listen to for half an hour. But if once we begin to regard the preacher (whatever his faults) as a man sent with a message to us, which it is a matter of life or death whether we hear or refuse; if we look upon him as set in charge over many spirits in danger of ruin, and having allowed to him but an hour or two in the seven days to speak to

[12] Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, II, ch. i, sec. 12.

them; if we make some endeavor to conceive how precious these hours ought to be to him—a small vantage on the side of God—after his flock have been exposed for six days together to the full weight of the world's temptations, and he has been forced to watch the thorn and the thistle springing in their hearts, and to see what wheat has been scattered there, snatched from the wayside by this wild bird and by that, and at last, when breathless and weary with the week's labor they give him this interval of imperfect and languid hearing—he has but thirty minutes to get at the hearts of a thousand mortals, to convince them of all their weaknesses, to shame them from all their sins, to warn them of all their dangers, to try by this way and that to stir the hard fastenings of those doors where the Master Himself has stood and knocked yet none opened to Him, to call at the opening of those dark streets, where Wisdom herself has stretched forth her hands and no man regarded—thirty minutes to raise the dead in; let us but once understand this, and then we shall look with changed eyes upon that frippery of gay furniture on the pulpit, from which the message of judgment must be delivered, which either breathes upon the dry bones that they may live, or (if ineffectual) remains recorded in condemnation perhaps against the utterer and the listener, but assuredly against one of them; we shall not so easily bear with the silk and gold upon the seat of judgment, nor with ornament of oratory in the mouth of the messenger; we shall wish that his words may be simple (even when they are sweetest), and the place from which he speaks like a marble rock in the desert, about which the people have gathered in their thirst.

Needless to say, this breathless excerpt is not quoted here as an illustration of happy para-

graphing or of sentence structure, but partly for its sane admonition to the florid preacher, and partly for its illustrative simplicity of vocabulary. We have indeed but a brief space for presentation of God's message to man, and we ought to make the best use possible of that space. "Thirty minutes" once a week? Not quite so much as that, when cumbered with "announcements" of parish events, weddings and funerals, financial statements and appeals—the scarcely avoidable but nevertheless intrusive noises of the world that preface the whisperings of the Spirit of God to our hearts and consciences. And what of the Short Sermon of eight or five minutes? Shall it consume both time and patience in technical, abstruse, or even unfamiliar words?

V

THE OBJECT OF A SERMON

CICERO spoke—and his auditors said: "What a splendid oration!" Demosthenes spoke—and the crowd exclaimed: "Let us go and fight Philip!"

In his *How to Preach,* Green comments on the comparison: "Without inquiring into the precise amount of truth in this comparison, we may take it as illustrating the matter under discussion. What the preacher should aim at is to send his hearers away full of admiration of the truth he has set forth and with a determination to carry it out in practice. It is not to be desired that they should leave the church simply remarking upon the eloquence and ability of the preacher."

We might naturally suppose that the illustrative comparison of Green is the immediate parent of another having a similar aim: "It has been said that there are two classes of eloquent sermons: one sends people away from church saying, 'What a fine preacher'; the other

sends people to their homes saying, 'What a terrible sinner I am.' "[1]

The immediate parent of Hall's comparison, however, seems to be the searching declaration of St. Francis de Sales: "Do you care to know how I estimate the excellence of a preacher? If the congregation go away smiting their breasts and saying, 'I will do so and so,' I think well of the sermon, not when they are all crying out, 'What a beautiful sermon! what an eloquent man!' Eloquence and touching words are human gifts, but when sinners are converted and turn from their wicked ways, we may be sure that God is speaking through His servant's lips, and that the preacher has the gift of counsel and the science of the Saints. The true aim of preaching is that sin be abolished, and righteousness abound on the earth. God sends preachers, as Jesus Christ sent His Apostles, that they may bring forth fruit, and their fruit may remain."

St. Francis reminds preachers that God sends them. The preacher is an ambassador of Christ, God as it were speaking through him. Obviously, he is a sorry kind of ambassador who diverts attention from his message to himself.

Thus far we are made clearly to understand that there is a negative side to the question of

[1] E. V. Hall, *Reading, Preaching and Choir Training.*

a sermon's object. Its object, aim or purpose must not be the glory of the preacher, the flattering verdicts of the congregation, the reputation for eloquence. Who will not admit this? But a false humility may wrongly conclude thence that an ambassador is permitted simply to deliver his message, how badly soever he may do this. On the contrary, he should do his best to make his auditory glad to hear him. He is indeed a poor sort of ambassador who delivers his message so haltingly, so uninterestingly, so cloudily, so perfunctorily, that those to whom he is sent would gladly avoid him or, compelled to listen, will easily let their imaginations draw them away to day-dreams about their own social, or domestic, or commercial, or political concerns. It is well understood that a very important part of an ambassador's business is to court popularity. It is nevertheless equally well understood that his purpose in acting thus is none other than to advance the interests of the country he represents. We may well rejoice to know that our congregations are pleased with our sermons if, meanwhile, we are conscious of the singleness of our purpose to preach, not ourselves, but only Christ. St. Paul became all things to all men. He was a most accomplished ambassador. But his one thought throughout was to gain all to Christ.

What might be called the general object of preaching has just been stated; namely, to gain all to Christ. Any lower aim is ruled out by non-Catholic, as well as Catholic, writers on Homiletics. In his large volume entitled *Homiletics* Hoppin says: "By reason of mistakes made upon the fundamental topic of the object of preaching, and of the related subject, the true sphere of the preacher, and the great evils that result from these errors, it becomes necessary for the young preacher to have some well-defined understanding of this whole matter. It is vital. . . . The end of preaching is to secure men's salvation; and there can be no truer and more comprehensive answer to the question, 'What is the object of preaching?' because salvation includes everything that is good in character and life. The object of Christ the Saviour is the object of his preachers. But such a phrase, 'to save souls,' is easily spoken, and may become stereotyped and meaningless." He goes on to say that the true object includes instruction, persuasion, edification.

The thought is echoed by Hoyt in his *The Work of Preaching*: "The end of the sermon is the salvation of men. . . . We must never forget that 'we stand in Christ's stead, persuading men to be reconciled to God.'" Kidder's warning is helpful: "There is danger of setting

up standards of external progress with which to be satisfied. . . . We should trample in the dust the ambition of preaching sermons to be admired, and exalt our aims to the more worthy aspiration of winning souls to Christ as often as we open our lips in his name." Etter,[2] picturing extensively the just results of proper preaching, continues: "How different in effect is such a sermon, from one that awakens only applause or admiration for the preacher and his eloquence. The true preacher hides himself behind the cross, and asks men not to look at him, but at Christ."

With a similar idealism, but with somewhat greater concreteness, does Bishop Dupanloup[3] argue that Fénelon, whose homiletic genius and practicality he vastly admired, did not pretend to place any ban upon eloquence in the pulpit:

> It is very clear, then, that Fénelon did not reject eloquence; but, at the same time, it is easily understood that, after having yielded so much to eloquence, he was certainly able to show a severity inflexible, and perhaps bold, to those who ascend the Christian pulpit only to *excite curiosity and admiration* by dazzling displays of profane eloquence, and by pleasing frivolous hearers to obtain from them blamable applauses. Fénelon had observed in his time what we should be too happy not to see in ours, namely, that there are nations and epochs in which "a de-

[2] *The Preacher and the Sermon.*
[3] *The Ministry of Preaching* (tr. Eales), pp. 148, 152.

praved taste, and a blind passion for saying something that is new," are infallible means of success. "These are they," he adds, "who are always applauded by women and by the generality of people who allow themselves to be easily dazzled. That is, nevertheless, nothing but a capricious fashion which needs to be upheld even by such a cabal as this . . . and ought ministers of the Gospel to be less seriously concerned for the eternal salvation of their flocks than heathen orators were for the interests of their country?"

Then Fénelon gravely demands, "Ought that mercenary eloquence to be endured? No," he replies, "the commonest occupations have some real object." . . . "A shoemaker at least makes shoes, and could not support his family without the money thus earned by seriously supplying a real necessity of the public." Let us not descend to a lower depth than he.

Assuredly, if the preacher deeply realizes that the general object of his sermonizing must primarily be the salvation of souls, he will be fired with a zeal that will take all kinds of trouble to achieve so extremely important a purpose—a zeal that will not brook hasty preparation with its consequent hazy exposition; a zeal that will mean a generously long meditation of his theme, careful arrangement of his matter, pleasing and apposite selection of illustrative material, a just employment of all the rhetorical devices intended to secure clearness, force, harmony; a zeal that will lead him to practice until he obtain distinct enunciation, a true kind of pulpit elocution,

warmth of manner, the accent of conviction. If the people love—as they invariably do love—to hear such a speaker, he will humbly rejoice in the fact, recognizing that it will make easier his great aim to lead souls to God.

So much for the general object of sermons. Each sermon, however, should in addition have a particular object. The famous lawyer and still more famous Liberator, Daniel O'Connell, once shrewdly observed that while a fine speech was a fine thing, the verdict was *the* thing. That is a good address to a jury, which gets the verdict sought for; and that address is a failure, howbeit filled with excellent rhetoric and brilliant eloquence, which fails to get the verdict. An apt illustration is quoted by English in his *For Pulpit and Platform:*

> The expert hunter of game teaches an indispensable homiletic lesson. "A Briton and a Boer went out shooting deer for food. The Briton took a case of cartridges with him, the Boer took one. 'Why,' asked the Briton, 'do you take only one cartridge?' 'Because,' was the reply, 'I want only one deer.'" The true preacher always remembers the target as well as the shot.

The same author quotes the consentient views of two preachers:

> Jefferson: "No question should be oftener on the preacher's lips than 'To what purpose is this?' That

is the question with which he should begin every sermon. On the first page he should write in clean, terse Saxon the precise work which this particular sermon is intended to do; and on the last page he should write his honest answer to the question: 'Is this sermon so constructed as to be likely to accomplish the result for which it has been written?' "

Abbott: "I soon learned what I regard as the first essential of an effective sermon. It must be addressed *to* a congregation, not an essay *about* a theme. . . . What do I want to say to this people at this time, and why do I want to say it? The first requisite of a good sermon, therefore, is a clearly-defined object, and this object, in the preacher's mind, should determine his choice of a subject. When this simple but fundamental truth first dawned upon me I was humiliated to find how many sermons I was preaching without a well-defined object. And to cure this defect I began to write down in my sermon notebook before the theme or the text the object which led me to select them both."

The wisdom which Abbott newly found is not, however, a new wisdom. St. Francis de Sales was not merely a cheerful preacher of piety but as well a capable critic of preachers. In *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales,* the Bishop of Belley tells us that "Francis used to say that it was not enough for a preacher to have a general intention of teaching God's ways; he ought to aim at some particular point in each sermon, as, for instance, explaining some doctrine or mystery, conquering a special vice, or inculcating a special virtue. 'You can hardly believe,'

he used to say, 'how important this is, or how many well thought out, ably written sermons fail to be useful for want of following this rule. It will make your sermons profitable to the hearers, but otherwise they may be very much admired, and yet bring forth no results.' " Needless to comment further on the wisdom of this thought or counsel of the Saint, save perhaps to note the humorous declaration of Whately that "Many a wandering discourse one hears in which the preacher aims at nothing, and hits it; for some speakers resemble an exploring party in a newly-discovered island—they start in any direction, without aim or object."

Meyenberg tells us [4] that the preacher should determine his aim clearly and "throughout the whole work and its delivery remain conscious of his aim," and continues:

> The omission or mere superficial handling of the determination of its aim robs the sermon of the life which alone produces an effect. If, in view of the fulness of the truths, the ideas and applications, which most of the themes contain, the preacher does not determine a special object in preaching, then the result will be, not a sermon, but mere empty talk and the priest will exhaust himself in a very short time. As little as an advocate in court may lose sight of his aim for a single moment in his address, so little

[4] *Homiletic and Catechetic Studies*, p. 66.

may the preacher, in the elaboration and delivery of his sermon, forget the objective thought thereof.

The whole sermon is, in view of its special purpose, simply the means to the end. In a great measure the value of every sermon which is to be studied or read, must be judged by its special aim, contained in the wider or closer relation of all its thoughts and feelings. The determination of the aim is, therefore, a principal part of the entire homiletic activity. Every sermon is a battle and a victory. Therefore in every sermon the question should be carefully weighed, through serious study, through prayer, and with a due regard to the people: What practical results do I wish to attain in the people, with the grace of God, through this sermon?

Perhaps the point has been illustrated too largely? Yet it is apparently so often overlooked in the composition and delivery of sermons that a little over-insistence may be pardoned. Certainly, Cardinal Newman spends not a little time, in his lecture on University Preaching, upon its inculcation and illustration. In his view, the preacher must have as definite an object, and aim at it as exclusively, as the marksman who essays the bull's-eye of a target. And he declares that "so much is contained for his direction in this simple maxim, that duly to enter into it and use it is half the battle; and if he mastered nothing else, still if he really mastered as much as this, he would know all that is imperative for the due discharge of his office." He argues the matter with great energy

and forcefulness and even pathetic appeal, showing that men who have one object definitely and exclusively before them, simply, spontaneously and visibly direct all their efforts, their skill, their resources, to its attainment. He lays down the precept that "preachers should neglect everything whatever besides devotion to their one object, and earnestness in pursuing it, till they in some good measure attain to these requisites. Talent, logic, learning, words, manner, voice, action, all are required for the perfection of a preacher; but 'one thing is necessary,'—an intense perception and appreciation of the end for which he preaches, and that is, to be the minister of some definite spiritual good to those who hear him."

St. Augustine tells us [5] what purpose he had in one of his sermons and how he achieved that purpose:

> Once while I was endeavoring to persuade the people of Caesarea in Mauretania to abolish a custom of combat between fellow-townsmen, in which relations, brothers, fathers, and children, divided into two parties, were in the habit of combating in public during many continuous days at a certain period of the year, and each one strove to kill him whom he attacked: I made use of the most powerful reasonings that I could devise in order to root out of the hearts and lives of that people a custom so cruel and

[5] Dupanloup, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiv.

so deeply seated. Nevertheless, I did not believe that I had made any impression, as long as I heard from them nothing but praises and acclamations; but when I saw them weeping, then I began to hope. Their acclamations showed that I had instructed them, and that my discourse gave them pleasure; but their tears showed that they were changed. When I saw tears rolling over their cheeks, I believed that this horrible custom, which they had received from their ancestors, and which had tyrannized over them for so long, would be abolished. . . . That is already eight years ago or more, and the people, by the grace of Jesus Christ, have never again attempted anything of the kind.

Similarly, St. Bernardine of Siena[6] had a clearly-defined object when, a millennium afterward, he heard upon leaving Rome news of civil strife in Siena, and declared that this alone had induced him to return there. He preached three consecutive sermons and other later discourses, all of them filled with a burning zeal, on the subject. He did not desist until he had gained his object. St. Augustine's description of the horrors of civil strife in Caesarea hardly matches the scene depicted by St. Bernardine:

How much evil has been wrought by the two factions of Guelfs and Ghibellines! How many women have been butchered in their own homes, within their native towns! How many others have been disemboweled, and how many children massacred for the

[6] Thureau-Dangin, *Saint Bernardine of Siena* (tr. Baroness v. Hugel), p. 191.

sake of being avenged on their father! How many infants have been extracted from their mother's womb, trampled upon and taken and hurled against a wall so as to crack their skulls! How much of the enemy's flesh has been sold by the butcher, just like ordinary meat, the heart being torn out and eaten raw! . . . Have I not heard of females so infuriated against the opposite party that they went so far as to put a lance into the hand of their tiny child in order that he might execute vengeance?

Both of these Saints and preachers had very definite aims in their sermons. The occasions called for definite measures, and not for general preachments on the duty of charity, the love of our fellowmen, the forgiveness of injuries, the burying of ancient resentments. *Hic et nunc* was something to be done, and done definitely and effectually.

But the ordinary Sunday sermon? No civil strife impends, no energetic measures are to be taken, nothing calls for urgent action. What special and particular object is to be gained, except an inculcation of the lesson drawn from the Gospel of the day and expounded in the sermon? True enough—but let that lesson be clearly apprehended by the preacher, its limits of application to his people be definite, its truth demonstrated, its necessity urged, its desirability and good effects winningly presented. In brief, let the preacher take to heart the burning words

quoted above from Cardinal Newman, and put all his strength in the effort to bring home to his people just that one lesson. If he truly conceives the meaning of "the definite object," he will make that object steer the whole thought of the sermon, as a rudder directs the course of a boat. He will not be diverted into side-issues, however interesting in themselves. He will not admit illustrative matter, however novel and attractive, if it does not really make clearer the matter in hand. He will use every resource of rhetoric, of psychology, of moving eloquence, to have his hearers put the lesson into effect.

In his admirable chapter on "Definite Object of Sermon," Father Feeney says:

> In a doctrinal sermon, the definite object is the spiritual impression of some revealed truth. A child listening to an explanation of the Seventh Commandment with its hand in another child's pocket stealing whatever it finds there, has no spiritual impression made on it by the speaker's words. Its conscience is not touched. It does not make the knowledge it receives personal, regulative, corrective. So, too, doctrinal knowledge must not be merely intellectual and impersonal. It must touch the heart and conscience . . . it must be even for a hardened sinner a bright vision of a higher life which he contrasts in sadness with the groveling life he is leading. . . .
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> The definite object of a moral sermon will usually be some particular practical resolution regarding Christian duty. . . . A resolution is practical when it is adapted to the person on whom it is urged. It

should not require extraordinary graces for its fulfilment; and it should not seek to raise one to a perfection foreign to one's state.

. . . It should also be particular; that is, it should not extend to all the offices of a virtue or to all the branches of a vice, but confine itself to one, so that it may be kept by the uniform repetition or omission of the same act.

As a rule, the definite object is a conclusion drawn, not by the people, but by the preacher for them.

An illustration may serve to indicate the propriety of selecting a definite object. Preaching on the parable of the mustard-seed in the Gospel of the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, the priest may take one of several possible objects. He may simply desire, because of certain conditions among his people, to hearten them by showing the wondrous fulfilment of the prophecy contained in the parable, and whilst thus strengthening their faith and sense of loyalty, enable them to withstand the persecutions which, in one form or another, bear hard on them even in the land of the free and the home of the brave; in a kindly, human way, he may wish to make them feel that they are, after all, "on the winning side." Or he may simply wish to enlighten their ignorance as to the immense efforts being made, in this very day in which they live, to sow the Gospel seed in the waste places of the Kingdom

of Heaven on earth; for they ought to know something of this edifying and romantic story, and they ought to lead their children to recognize its actuality, its heroism, its absorbing interest, in the devout hope that some of the children may hear and obey a call from "Yonder." Or the preacher may wish to get a generous collection for the foreign missions.

Now these objects are by no means identical, although they are closely connected. The sermon may, indeed, seek to attain all three objects. But it can scarcely do justice to more than one of them within the limits of twenty minutes ordinarily allotted to the sermon, and it will further labor under the disadvantage of appearing to be diffuse and perfunctory. If a generous collection *hic et nunc* is desired, a rehearsal of the glories of missionary effort in past ages may have to give place to a reasoned declaration that Catholics have an urgent, present-day duty to fulfil; that the missionary, feeling this truth more keenly than others of his acquaintance, leaves father and mother, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives, the comforts of civilized life, the delights of social converse, and the like, in order to preach the Gospel to uncouth tribes, to suspicious and mayhap hostile heathen, and live amidst their squalor, deprived of the moral comfort and support of comrades, of home-

customs, of the friendly mother-tongue, and so on; that when the missionary spontaneously endures all this breaking of old ties, all these heart-wrenching conditions of strangeness and terrible solitariness, it is pitiful that his sublime efforts should be hampered by the mere lack of financial aid—that a task, awful in itself, should become doubly so because the good folk at home fail to realize how much help they could give him at so little cost to themselves. The romantic side—or what may seem to readers of missionary literature to be such—of life in foreign lands, will not receive mention in such a sermon. Rather will the forbidding elements and conditions of such a life be emphasized—the personal toil and sweat of the missionary who builds a shack for his catechumens and converts to worship in; the long foot-journeys he must take, for lack of animal or mechanical conveyance; the watchings and fastings, the careful economies of food, and even of medicine, he must exercise. And these conditions would be vastly changed, if only the folk at home, upon whose dear faces he may perchance look once more if he be sent home broken with toils and fevers, but whose memory is fresh with him at every Holy Mass that he says, could only see him as he is in his daily life. The duty of giving generously will then be urged, sentiment will be

appealed to, good-will aroused, emotions deeply stirred.

On the other hand, if the object of the sermon be not a collection, but the general stimulation of Christian zeal for missionary work, the preacher will rather emphasize the glory of apostolic labors in winning souls to Christ, the opportunities offered to every one at home to participate in this divine work by prayer, by financial aid, by membership in the "Society of the Propagation of the Faith" or in the "Students' Crusade," and the like. To make these suggestions practical, the preacher will be very definite in pointing out how all these various things can be accomplished, will give names and addresses of missionary societies and publications; will, in a word, exhibit a personal warmth and zeal that should again justify the warning that "Example is more powerful than precept."

Finally, if his object be to hearten his people and increase their sense of loyalty to the Church amidst conditions of subtle persecution, he will prefer to omit a reference—at least, any extended reference—either to the need of supporting missionary enterprises or to the difficulties faced by the missionary in our own day.

A clearly-defined object will greatly assist the priest in formulating his thought, in giving it point and efficacy, in relieving the sermon of

purple patches and futile digressions, in giving it coherence and cogency, in saving effort and time, in selecting appropriate illustrations, in preparing the way for direct application of lesson or moral to the lives and activities of his hearers. He will not beat the air. He will not preach simply because his turn has come for occupying the pulpit during twenty golden minutes, or because he loves to hear his own voice in swelling periods and pietistic exhortations, or for any other than a sanely devout motive—for, in truth, the earnestness of conviction which arises from close study of any Catholic doctrine will flow into his own soul and thence into his own speech, so that what may have been begun as a necessary task will ere long be magically transformed into an unforeseen pleasure. The tasteless bread has at length become sweet by thorough mastication.

VI

THE DOCTRINAL SERMON

A CURIOUS thing occurred in England in the summer of 1921. The London *Telegraph* of 5 September had an editorial entitled "Religion Without Dogma," which was based on a discourse delivered by Canon Adderley, of St. Paul's, Covent Garden. "You cannot prove a dogma, but you can live a life. That," said the writer, "seems to be the main argument of Canon Adderley's discourse." Whether the writer was correct in this statement, does not concern us. He says elsewhere: "Another useful point raised was the contrast which, according to the Canon, exists between Christ's way of preaching His divine Father, and the Church's way. *If the Church has failed,* it is very likely due to a want of recognition of this contrast, because more true converts are made by revealing the spirit in which the Divine Founder of our religion lived and thought than could ever have been effected by a series of propositions to be accepted and acknowledged as truth."

"If the Church has failed"—the italics placed in the quotation are not the writer's, but ours. Now the curious thing is that more than a week before this editorial appeared, the redoubtable and strangely prescient G. K. Chesterton had contributed to the *Illustrated London News* of 27 August a highly characteristic article on the subject of why people do not go to church. His article is really an anticipatory answer to the *Telegraph's* editorial. "Perhaps," says G. K. C., "the commonest explanation given is that the sermons are dull. Probably it is true that the ordinary sermon is dull. But the ordinary sermon blazes with wit, compared with the ordinary newspaper article about the Failure of the Church." He continues: "I cannot believe that the silliest curate, in his stupidest sermon, was ever quite so vague, so vapid, so invertebrate, so incapable, and even incurious, in discovering what he was talking about,[1] as is

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[1] Chesterton knew "what he was talking about." Elsewhere he has written: "Most people who talk about making up their minds simply mean neglecting their minds and following their wishes or their whims. To make up their mind it is necessary to use the mind and at least to have a mind to use. Let them make up their minds to be Bolshevists, or to be Die-Hards, or to be anything, but let them do it with their minds, with a consciousness of their first principles and a thorough thinking out of their results." His recent conversion to Catholicity has not impaired the force of his remarks forming a sort of text for the present article on doctrinal sermons, which was written nearly a year ago. The

the kind of layman who writes letters and articles in the papers about the problem of the empty churches."

The editorial disparages "a series of propositions to be accepted and acknowledged as truth," and observes that "the lives of the saints are of more value and come nearer to the work of Christ than the decrees of Councils or the judgments of inquisitors."

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editorial in the *Telegraph*, printed one week later than his lovely diatribe, is too long to be quoted here in full as an illustration of his contention that the stupidest sermon of the silliest curate is not "so vague, so vapid, so invertebrate, so incapable, and even incurious, in discovering what he was talking about as is the pronouncement of an ordinary layman, even though he be editor of a great daily newspaper, on why people do not go to church." A few sentences may, however, be added in quotation: "In other words, the test is to be a practical one. 'The key to the acceptance of the divinity of Christ,' said Canon Adderley, 'lies in our own experience as praying Christians. It cannot be proved simply by pointing to texts in the Bible. We have to put ourselves under the same spell under which the first disciples lived day by day, and out of which they came to acknowledge Him as God.' 'Somehow,' added the Canon, 'the disciples could not feel the same about any human teacher as they did about their Lord.' And this itself is a valuable criterion for practical men." It seems that "practical men" judge a man not by what he says or does, but by how they "feel" when he speaks or acts. The editor accordingly instructs ministers: "The duty of ministers of religion is to make their congregations feel the beauty and spiritual power of Jesus of Nazareth." Again, the Canon "gradually led the thoughts of his hearers away from a religion which depends mainly on dogma, to a religious life in accordance with the tenets of the New Testament." Are there, then, any "tenets"—that is, doctrines, dogmas—in the New Testament? How came the editor to "feel" that a tenet is different from a doctrine? And what is the force of the word "mainly"?

Almost as in answer to this, "It is perfectly true," says G. K. C., "that the creed of many old conventional parsons was a very dried-up and detached sort of affair. It is quite true that it rattled in their heads like a dried pea in a bladder. But in the mind of the sceptical layman there is not even a dried pea to rattle; there is not even a dead creed to return an echo. All is solemn silence within."

It is true that the lives of the saints are a sort of living Gospel.[2] "Let us go and preach," said St. Francis of Assisi, and his sermon consisted simply of a walk through the streets and lanes of the town. But which one of the saints attained the heights of holiness except by the ladder of his creed? Which one of them would for a moment think or talk vaguely about "Religion Without Dogma"? The assumption seems to be that the Saint of saints did not Himself preach any creed, but only lived a life. *Preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned.* Did Christ preach no "hard sayings"? Or did He call back

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[2] St. Francis de Sales advocates the use, in sermons, not only of the Scriptures but also of the writings of saints and doctors of the Church, adding that the lives of the saints are simply practical illustrations of the Gospels: "The difference between the Word and the Saints' lives is like to that between music in score and the same music sung by living voices."

those who complained that "this is an hard saying" and who forthwith left Him and walked no more with Him? Every Christian has a commission to be Christlike. The ministers of Christ, however, have still further the commission: *Go, teach all nations.* And so we have "the doctrinal sermon."

Is the doctrinal sermon inescapably dull? Let us hear some of Chesterton's delightful *causerie* on the dulness of sermons:

> For the practical question, I think it is true that the ordinary Sunday sermon has become rather pointless and sterile. Personally, I should like preaching done by preaching friars; by people trained, and traveling for that particular purpose. But if the sermon has weakened, it is, I think, for the very contrary reason to that commonly alleged. The parson is not dull because he is always expounding theology, but because he has no theology to expound. This is quite as true of bad theology as of good; of things I utterly disbelieve as of anything I believe. The old Scotch Calvinistic sermons kept a very high intellectual average, and intensely interested the Scotch peasants who were trained under them. And this is not so much because theology is necessary to religion, as simply because logic is necessary to theology. Logic is at least a game, and the old Calvinistic preachers played the game. . . . The Scotch peasants went eagerly every Sabbath to see a Presbyterian minister performing like an acrobat. But there was some real fun, because there was some real thinking. And there was some real thinking because there was some real theology.

There is some real fun in this analysis, because there is some real thinking. Still, the defense of the doctrinal sermon against the charge of dulness will hardly rest secure upon such a basis in our own times. Would the Scotch peasants now flock on Sunday mornings to hear the old Calvinistic theology set forth with whacking argument? The novelty of revolt has passed away, the argumentative contentiousness no longer attracts. People whom Euclid would bore to death will nevertheless flock to hear Einstein, although the argumentation of Euclid is, after all, quite intelligible to ordinary minds that are willing to be attentive. But Euclid has long since passed from a novelty into the text-book. Like Wordsworth, "there was a boy—ye knew him well," ye badly-printed pages of Pope and Maguire! His thirteen or fourteen summers left him quite incapable of understanding the heated *Discussion* of the famed protagonists. But one of his very first absorbing activities, morning after morning upon rising from bed, was given wholly to Pope and Maguire. He felt the thrill of combat in his blood. It was an arid arena, forsooth, but he felt withal that the fur was flying, and he wanted to be there throughout the fight and in at the finish. And so will a dog-fight detain as interested spectators a crowd of men who pro-

fess to believe that time is money. As for a fight between Dempsey and Carpentier. . . .!

Chesterton, however, follows on with "a yet more practical point":

> Theology is a science, true or false, and the point applies not only to any other theology, but to any other science. A science is a thing that can be taught to ordinary men; that can be taught *by* ordinary men. Those who say that religion is more akin to poetry may be right on a certain plane of perfection. But we cannot ask ten thousand country vicars to be all poets. But if there were a real school of theology, we could ask them to be all schoolmasters. Anything like a system can be learnt by any number of normal intelligent men, and can be taught in turn to any type of normal intelligent congregation. Those who say that religion is a sort of prophetic inspiration are asking all these ordinary men to be inspired prophets. But if religion could be practical instruction, there is no sort of reason why ordinary men should not practically instruct.

This is not brilliant paradox, it is simple common sense, uttered in the simplest possible phraseology. Unless the preacher has a system of belief and practice to talk about, what other theme shall he take save his own vague impressions, and that is, to speak practically, himself: "Now, all the broad-minded business about religion simply means that the parson is to talk about himself, because he is to have nothing better to talk about. He is to give us every Sunday his own hazy feelings about humanity, be-

cause he has no moral system to apply to particular human problems." One would like to follow G. K. C. in his more complete setting forth of his analysis, sparkling with the unwonted humor of downright honesty, but let us conclude with this:

> Now, the old notion of preaching was far more sensible, whether in the days of Puritan divines or of Franciscan and Dominican demagogues. The idea was that a man, having learnt something definite, had something definite to teach. He could give every week, not carefully timed outbursts of literary inspiration, but sections and sub-sections of an already existing moral science. Just as the popular scientists could talk one day about giraffes and another day about germs, so the popular priest could preach one day about infanticide and another day about usury. As one could take one tribe of animals at a time, the other could take one type of man at a time. . . . The exposition of such a system would at least be a great deal more amusing than asking an average man to prove his large-mindedness by talking at large.

But what is a "doctrinal" sermon? The word itself, derived from *docere,* would comprise all the things contained in Christ's commission to the apostles to "teach all nations"—teach what? A series of propositions (as the editorial expresses its thought) such as we call a creed? No, but "all things whatsoever I shall have commanded you," beliefs and practices, sacraments and sacred observances. Every

sermon is to illustrate the threefold warning "*docere, placere, movere.*" Upon a solid substructure of clearly expressed and demonstrated truth is to be raised up a superstructure of moral and religious practice.

It is doubtless for this reason that Father Feeney divides [3] sermons into topical (when the theme is "some revealed doctrine or duty"), homiletic (when the Gospel or Epistle is expounded and applied verse by verse), and catechetical (when religion is systematically taught "according to the order of the catechism or of theology"). The topical sermon is thus included under the catechetical course, as a unit of it.

Meyenberg divides [4] sermons differently: dogmatic, apologetic, moral, and on the means of grace. As has been already pointed out, every sermon is doctrinal in one sense, because it teaches something about faith or morals or religious observance. But a sermon may wish to elevate into great prominence some particular phase of general doctrine, and since the Christian life comprises the two fundamentals of belief and practice, a simple division would be *dogmatic* (or doctrinal in a restricted sense) and *moral.*

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[3] Feeney, *Manual of Sacred Rhetoric,* p. 69.
[4] Meyenberg, *Homiletic and Catechetic Studies,* pp. 692–721.

If it were said of a sermon that it was "doctrinal," people would understand generally what has just been described as the "dogmatic" sermon. It is of this "creedal" variety the editor was thinking when he entitled his editorial "Religion Without Dogma." Under the heading of doctrinal or dogmatic sermons might be included what are specifically styled "apologetic" and "controversial" sermons. Of the apologetic sermon Meyenberg discourses at length (pages 700-714). Of the controversial sermon McGinnes[5] treats briefly, but well. There is first of all the direct method, an open attack upon the peculiar doctrines of the sects. "It is difficult to imagine circumstances which can justify a preacher in attacking openly and directly the religious belief of others. . . . It may be doubted whether one spark of the love of God was ever lighted up in the soul, or whether one unbeliever was ever converted to the faith by the mere agency of the direct controversial lecture. Of the evil passions which are stirred up, and of the rancor, the bitterness, and the uncharitableness, which are too often the fruit of these discourses, there can, unfortunately, be no doubt. When we attack Protestant belief or practice directly, we are apt

[5] McGinnes, *The Ministry of the Word*, pp. 14–18.

to put our whole auditory into wrong disposition. The un-Catholic portion of it we hurt, and perhaps exasperate by a description of their belief which they will be likely to regard as inaccurate or exaggerated. To the Catholic portion, on the other hand, we are addressing ourselves in words which are of little practical use to them, and which they have a certain satisfaction, and not a very Christian one, in applying to their neighbors." But there is the indirect method, which may be most happily handled. The preacher will simply expound and prove a Catholic doctrine without openly referring to objections or opposite beliefs. This indirect method is practically equivalent to the doctrinal or dogmatic sermon as generally understood.

The dogmatic sermon, then, is chiefly concerned with proving some doctrine of the Church. Various questions might be asked concerning it. Where a people has been converted to the true Faith, and in so far the commission given to the apostles and their successors has been carried out successfully, is the doctrinal sermon still to be deemed either necessary or highly expedient? In brief, is it serviceable today to an ordinary Catholic congregation whose members have already been instructed in the catechism and have been living under the reign of sacraments and sacred observances?

Potter[6] answers the question for us:

> In these days we live amidst an atmosphere of influences which are adverse to every prompting of Christian truth, and to every conviction which is founded on the simplicity of Christian faith. The doubts which are raised in our own hearts by him who was a liar from the beginning; those which are suggested by the very books which we read, by the newspapers and periodicals which we take up, by the anti-religious productions, which the zeal of the scoffer and the infidel scatters with such reckless profusion, and by the discourses to which we are every day obliged to listen in our ordinary and inevitable intercourse with the world—all these things, and a thousand more of the like nature, inevitably tend to undermine and to weaken the simplicity of Christian faith. And how are our Catholic people to be protected against these evils, and strengthened . . . unless by the frequent exposition, and the clear and solid establishment, of the dogmas and the teachings of Christian truth?

This excerpt is only a brief portion of the long argument *pro* of Father Potter. The need today may not be of the same nature as that which confronted the first sowers of the Divine Word, but it is as urgent. To conserve is as necessary as to create. The harder judgment may fall on the backsliding Christian than on the unenlightened pagan.

The dogmatic sermon, then, is still needed. The preacher is apt to shrink from it for either

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[6] Potter, *The Pastor and His People*, p. 21.

or both of two reasons. First, it requires much preliminary study, a complete understanding of the dogma and of its supporting proofs, a careful statement of these in intelligible vernacular phraseology, a well-coördinated planning of the sermon, much clarifying illustration of statement and proof, and a practical application of the dogmatic truth thus luminously presented and logically established, to the every-day business of Christian living. All this demands harder work than a sermon which appeals to the people to practice some virtue or avoid some vice.

The second reason why the preacher may shrink from the hard task is that he deems it also an arid and uninviting task. He perhaps found the explications and demonstrations of truth in his theological course rather "dry" reading. Will the re-hash of all this be more appetizing to his congregation? Chesterton clearly thinks that the tedious sermon is the platitudinous one that talks at large instead of undertaking to teach something. People like to learn something from the lips of their preachers. They have, after all, a divine hunger for divine truth. Their souls are by nature Christian in idealism, in ethical striving, in eternal hopes and fears. Obviously, however, the "re-hash" of theological class-work is forbidding. The

doctrinal sermon may indeed be an arid waste of scholastic explication and demonstration, cumbered with citation and discussion of Scripture texts, excerpts from the Fathers and theologians, proofs from reason and Revelation, unenlivened by any human touch of imagination or of sympathy or of spiritual unction. The pattern of the theological class is not to be copied in the composition of a sermon. Their purposes and methods are quite disparate. Their audiences are most dissimilar. St. Francis de Sales tells us something relevant to our difficulty: "You cannot conceive," said the Saint to M. Belley, "how beautiful the truths of our holy faith are when we consider them in a spirit of peace and tranquillity. We smother them when we labor to over-adorn them, and we hide them when we strive to bring them too prominently forward. To propose these truths with the utmost simplicity, is one of the most efficacious means of persuading, provided that our hearers do not resist the Holy Ghost. If the Holy Ghost do not illumine the soul with His supernatural light, all our proofs are feeble and useless, and we only place obstacles to the interior action of the Spirit when we heap proof upon proof, and argument upon argument." The methods of the classroom are, then, not those of the pulpit. Minds trained poorly, or not at all, to follow

consecutive reasoning will not be enlightened by the argumentation of the classroom. The Scriptural texts which really prove or support our homiletic thesis may, when discussed in the pulpit, appear to tell against rather than for us. Neale [7] gives us three apparently authentic examples of the ease with which a preacher may confound rather than convince the intelligence of his auditory:

> One [modern anecdote] is related by an eminent living prelate, who, with the greatest good humor, is in the habit of telling it as a warning to his clergy to preach plainly. While he was still serving a curacy, he was anxious to try his hand at extempore preaching, and, accordingly, took for his text, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." On this subject he dwelt, much to his satisfaction, for the usual time; he proved from the works of creation, from the construction of our own bodies, and from the other usual topics, that there must be a creative power, and that that creative power is God. He came down from the pulpit with the comfortable conviction that he had not done so badly after all. Happening to walk home with a farmer who had attended the service, he was anxious to learn what impression he had produced, and accordingly made some observation which led to the point he wished to introduce. "A very capital sermon you gave us, Mr. B.," remarked his companion; "but, somehow, I can't help thinking there be a God, for all you said."
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> The other anecdote was related to me by another

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[7] Neale, *Mediæval Preachers and Mediæval Preaching*, pp. xlvi–xlvii.

prelate of our Church. He happened to be staying in a country village, when a stranger was accidentally called in to preach. His text was, "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night." His sermon was very much to the point, so far as educated persons were concerned. But, on the following day, the Bishop happened to inquire of an old woman in the parish if she had understood, and how she liked the discourse. "Very much, indeed," was her reply; "and I always *did* hear say that it was by night the fairies danced on Harborough Hill." So much for the preacher's description of the character of the Pharisees.

The present writer may lay claim to the praise which Dryden bestowed on Melbourne—that of being the "fairest of critics"—by relating a somewhat similar circumstance which happened to himself. He had been preaching on the subject of Baptism, and had tried to explain, in the most popular way he could, the distinction between regeneration and conversion, dwelling particularly on the difference between the *one* Baptism and the repeated repentances. He thought, like the excellent prelate to whom we have referred, that he had been particularly intelligible; and, perhaps with some little idea of being praised for his plainness, he afterwards made some observation to the most intelligent auditor in a very ignorant congregation. "The very best sermon I ever heard preached," was his remark; "I had never seen so clearly before, that, when we have fallen into sin, we can be baptized again to get out of it."

In every congregation there will probably be some folk such as those depicted in the three modern instances of Neale. It is equally probable that not more will be so intellectually

trained as to be able to follow a close train of reasoning such as a class in theology is reasonably expected to do. The dogmatic sermon must be popular. It must strive to rivet attention and to convey truth at the same time. Withal, it must not only convince the intellect, but must move the will to loyalty in action.

Objections to the truth we have stated and proved should not be made formally, but should rather be anticipated and indirectly refuted. This will be best accomplished if the text which is the basis for the objection be used as a proof of the truth, as though no objection had been founded upon it. As Potter again remarks: "Thus, by a little skill, prudence, and study, the preacher may disguise every objection, and turn that which seemed to be a difficulty into an absolute proof in support of his doctrine." Potter[8] devotes forty pages to the doctrinal sermon. They could be marked, read and digested with much profit.

Some points are brought out[9] interestingly by O'Dowd. First of all:

> To clear the ground, I may say that there are portions of theology that cannot be popularized in preaching, except by a man with a consummate gift of exposition; further than this, there are some parts

[8] Potter, *Sacred Eloquence*, pp. 162–200.
[9] O'Dowd, *Preaching*, pp. 154–158.

of it that no mortal preacher can render intelligible to a mind untrained in the methods of the schools.

The theology of text-books, to be made accessible, must be made less subtle; no metaphysical treatise in divinity can be cut up into sermons and preached as it stands. A good example of the simplification of theology, the metamorphosis of a treatise into a sermon, has been pointed out by a modern writer on St. Augustine.[10] . . .

There is another thing to be done also, not so much by way of change as by way of addition. Scholastic theology is usually unemotional; it reduces religion, as far as it is capable of being thus transposed, to terms of abstract thought. Now, religion as it is in a man, religion as we wish to preach it, is not shut up in intellectual categories; it seeks contact with all human faculties. Scholastic theologians constantly warn their readers of the danger of the imagination getting into the way of the intelligence and upsetting the speculative judgment. This is very well for theologians, but it is not so well for ordinary people, in whom the imagination and the feelings hold a dominant place.

Theology, then, as used in preaching, must be directed towards devotion; it should seize the affections as well as give understanding to the intelligence. Let me illustrate this. Thousands of sermons on the Sacred Heart have proceeded on this plan: the Heart of Christ is a part of the Sacred Humanity. Now, as the Sacred Humanity is united hypostatically with the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, it is adorable; and since the whole is adorable, so too are all the constituent parts. Therefore the Heart of Christ is adorable. As theology, this is, if not very profound, at least correct, but if a whole sermon is all

[10] Montgomery, *St. Augustine: Aspects of His Life and Thought*, chap. vii.

taken up with it (as it has often been in my experience) what spiritual benefit can the people possibly get from it? They do not require the truth of the adorableness of the Sacred Heart to be proved to them by this theological algebra. What they do want is the same truth commended to them in terms of the imagination and the affections. We have only to open our Breviary to find this ready to our hand:

> Amor coegit Te tuus
> Mortale Corpus sumere,
> Ut novus Adam redderes
> Quod vetus ille abstulerat.
> Non Corde discedat tuo
> Vis illa Amoris inclyti:
> Hoc fonte gentes hauriant
> Remissionis gratiam.

Finally, he recommends the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas to the young preacher: "He will be seldom disappointed if he takes up the index of the *Summa Theologica* and looks up the point he purposes to explain. He may not find exactly what he is looking for in the first or the second reference, but he is almost sure to light upon it before he has come to the end of them. Some think that the Summa is a very stiff book of theology, but taken on the whole it is not so; it is certainly much easier and infinitely more interesting than most modern commentaries upon it. It is not all-sufficient, for when it has been consulted one has usually nothing more than a very solid framework. Still, after

all, the framework is the main thing. To fill in the outline is not hard, when the outline is definite. Expansion of the central thoughts supplied by the Summa is obtained by developing the ideas and illustrations in the passage of the Summa itself, or by seeking it from Sacred Scripture or other devotional sources.''

In Appendix IV (pp. 225-233) O'Dowd outlines most briefly a course of sermons for three years. He prefaces the course with a list of books of reference, the Bible coming first, the Summa second, the Catechism of the Council of Trent third, and various learned devotional works completing the list. A glance through the suggested sermons will show the use made of the Summa.

VII

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SERMON

ONE of the happiest introductions[1] recorded in the history of eloquence, sacred or profane, was that of St. Paul to the sermon he delivered "standing in the midst of the Areopagus" at Athens. Looking down from that slight eminence upon the innumerable idols in the streets of the city, he wished to preach the True God to a congregation of Stoics, Platonists, Aristotelians, Eclectics; of sophists, rhetoricians, disputers, contentious arguers; of cynics, materialists, atheists, sceptics.

Now St. Paul had been waiting at Athens for Silas and Timothy. He had seen the idols and

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[1] Introduction has been chosen instead of Exordium for the reason that this latter term perhaps suggests too much formalism and corresponding lengthiness. According to Moeslein (*The Mechanism of Discourses*, pp. 78–113) it comprises the Fundamental, the Redition, the Relation, the Exitus. Strambi comprised in it: Text, Fundamental, Redition, Exitus, Theme, Explanation or Narration, Division, Invocation. It might seem to be as long as a sermon itself. The Introduction, says Hitchcock (*Sermon Composition*, p. 28) is "the *Proem* of Corax, Isocrates and Aristotle, the *Preparation* of Herbart. the *Historical Prelude* of St. Ignatius, the *Exordium*, the *Opening.*" The Introduction or Opening appears to be sufficiently simple and comprehensive.

the altars set up to all the gods and, says St. Luke, "his spirit was stirred within him, seeing the city wholly given to idolatry." Filled with this spirit, he at length has the opportunity to address this curiosity-loving, disputatious, self-satisfied, humorously polite mob.

Does his introduction flame with indignant reproach against these triflers? Doubtless he felt in every nerve of his sensitive organization the covert sneers, the cynical attentiveness, the frankly hostile faces or pretentiously courteous poses, of a people that spent its time mostly in telling or hearing some new thing. He begins his address, nevertheless, with a compliment. "Ye men of Athens," he says, "I perceive that in all things you are very religious-minded."[2]

The compliment is immediately explained and justified by a personal anecdote: "For," continues the Apostle, "passing by, and seeing your idols, I found an altar also, on which was written: To the unknown God." The anecdote is not merely personal; it is also local, particular, striking.

This introduction comprises but two short sentences. It is therefore very brief, according well with the brevity of the discourse itself which he delivered.

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[2] The Vulgate has *quasi superstitiosiores*, translated in Challoner's Douay as "too superstitious."

It is also directly preparatory to the whole body of the discourse, as well as to the distinctly-stated theme or proposition: "What therefore you worship without knowing it, that I preach to you: God, who made the world, and all things therein . . ." The Introduction neatly dovetails into the Transition just quoted, and the Apostle has gently, unpretentiously, modestly, launched out upon the deeps of his discourse.

There are exceptional cases that dispense with an introduction. The Roman senate that heard Cicero bursting out into a torrent of abuse against Catiline had no leisure to question rhetorically whether this exordium *ex abrupto* was in good form or not. The occasion was itself the Introduction.

A sheriff desiring to harangue a mob of would-be lynchers may well dispense with other introduction than the circumstances surrounding him. Deep emotion, shared equally by priest and people, permits of direct and abrupt speech, for a similar reason. Massillon, delivering the funeral oration over Louis "the Great," broke the painful silence with the simple words, "My brethren, God alone is GREAT."

Ordinarily, however, some kind of introduction is necessary. Its purpose is to place the auditory *en rapport* with the preacher and with

his theme. This is natural. The dawn heralds faintly at first, then more brilliantly, the coming of the full daylight. The book begins with its Preface or Foreword; even the social conversation has its courtesy of commencement, whilst the business "deal" or "proposition" shapes itself, perhaps unconsciously but nevertheless logically and naturally, into the form of Introduction, Transition, Argumentation, Conclusion or Peroration. A congregation may dislike being metaphorically lifted by the hair of the head into unexpected regions of homiletic argument, as "the angel did with Habacuc, when he took him by the hair of his head and transported him in an instant from Judea to Babylon."[3]

After all, introductions are natural, not artificial, although they do indeed suppose art (not artifice) in their construction. They should prepare the auditory to listen attentively to the sermon, should present the preacher himself in an amiable light, should gently lead the minds of the people away from material to spiritual interests, should smooth the way to a more direct contemplation of the theme that is to be treated; and, to achieve all this, should be really interesting and attractive. Much depends upon

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[3] Claude, *An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon* (Eng. tr., New York), p. 207.

the impression made by the preacher in his first sentences, just as much depends upon speech and manner and dress in a first meeting with other men, whether for social or commercial ends.

We have noted that St. Paul's introduction was excellent for five reasons. It was brief, kindly, striking, truly prefatory to the discourse, modulatory.

First, it was brief, comprising but two short sentences. Some rhetoricians compare the exordium to the porch of a house. A fine or large mansion should have a fine or large porch; that is, there should be some proportion of one to the other in respect both of size and of splendor. As the long sermon is practically a thing of the past and has given place to the definitely short discourse, the introduction should be appropriately shortened.

Long-winded introductions tire the congregation. A certain preacher, having given as usual a very long preface to his sermon, had to listen to this comment from one of his auditors: "Well, sir, you kept us so long in the porch this morning that we hardly got into the house." The figure of speech was varied on another occasion: "He is so long in laying the cloth," said a clever listener concerning a preacher who was addicted to long exordiums, "that I lose my

appetite, and begin to think there will be no dinner, after all."

Such introductions sin against the proprieties in several ways. They consume time that should better be devoted to illustrating and enforcing the argument of the whole sermon. Instead of attracting the listener, they give him a feeling of satiety and disgust before the feast of reason has really begun. They are apt to include matter that properly belongs to the body of the discourse. In any event, they are inartistic because disproportioned.

Secondly, St. Paul's introduction was kindly. He complimented the Athenians on their sense of religious respect. They were "over-religious." We can easily imagine with what a winning courtesy he said this. Cicero considers the object of an introduction to be the rendering of the auditors *benevolos, attentos, dociles.* St. Paul made his hearers *benevolos.* As flame lights flame, so kindliness begets kindliness.

The "compliment" formed a part of the complicated exordium prescribed by the older rhetoricians. It became regularized, and easily degenerated into fulsome adulation, doubtless false ascriptions of virtue, and tediousness through formality. At times it bore no special relation to the burden of the following sermon. St. Paul managed adroitly to combine compli-

ment with strict relativity to the matter of his discourse. He was a gentleman through and through, and knew how to avoid both falsehood and fulsomeness.

Great delicacy of mind and heart is required for a proper handling of the "compliment," and a better taste has generally omitted it from the exordium. Occasions nevertheless arise which justify, perhaps demand, its use. If delivered at all, let it be with obvious sincerity and cordiality.

An indirect form of compliment is that of apology to one's auditory for venturing to address such a brilliantly endowed assembly. This will not be so crudely stated as I have just put it, but will be implied by a species of pretended self-abasement. The personal note is always questionable, generally objectionable, seldom happy. If apologetic in tone or in matter, it is —or is apt to be considered—insincere. The preacher of the true Faith is an ambassador of God, Christ as it were speaking through him. He is to exalt his Divine Master, not himself; but he is clothed with the dignity of his position, and is not to abase himself, save to God. He must show due respect to authority, sacred and civil. He must exhibit true reverence to the divine spark in every human being—in man, woman, child. But the assumption of a false

modesty, a timid self-abasement or its outward semblance, is repugnant alike to good taste and to true reverence.

St. Paul was polite and respectful to the divine spark in his hearers. He seems to have made them, at least for a time, well-disposed toward himself. He rendered them, in the Ciceronic word, *benevolos,* although his temptation was probably toward indignant rebuke.

Phelps[4] contrasts the two manners:

> That was not a wise man who, in the time of the Civil War, in a Southwestern State commenced a sermon by laying a revolver on the pulpit by the side of the Bible, saying that his life had been threatened, and that he was prepared to defend it, as he would against a mad dog. A humble Massachusetts chaplain was his superior in homiletic tact, who was compelled by Gen. Butler to preach to a wealthy Presbyterian congregation of rebels in Norfolk, who were also in their seats on the Sabbath morning, in obedience to military order. Said the preacher, in commencing his discourse, "My friends, I am here by no choice of mine. I came to your city as a chaplain, to look after the souls of my neighbors who are here, as I am, under military rule. I stand in the place of your honored pastor by command of my military superior; but I am a preacher of the same Christ whom you possess, and I ask you to hear me for his sake." He had a respectful hearing for the next three months.

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[4] Phelps, *The Theory of Preaching,* p. 227.

The personal note was demanded in this case, but it was delivered in a modest and withal a manly way. The chaplain made his hearers *benevolos* by an introduction that paid a graceful tribute to the pastor whilst explaining the inevitable substitution of a military chaplain in his place.

Thirdly, St. Paul wrought out a striking introduction that surely must have rendered his hearers *attentos*—the second of Cicero's three requisites. Having complimented them on their exceptionally pious memorials to the gods, he gives them an anecdote which, like all anecdotes, must immediately have aroused their interest, but which had the additional spice of local flavoring. Among their many idols, he saw an altar erected to the Unknown God. This allusion to their famous city was graceful, direct, striking. Their curiosity was aroused. Will this stranger have anything pertinent to say about the altar or altars that had been erected to the now forgotten gods? Why, let us hear him, by all means.

The interested attention of an audience may be gained in several ways. The most effective and most commonly used method is that of the anecdote. Often it need not be strongly relevant—it may be "lugged in by the ear" without offending us, for we are all but children

of a larger growth, and we love stories because they are something concrete, something which we can easily vision to ourselves. If the narrator be a participant in that which he tells us, or even only an eye-witness, we are still more interested. St. Paul's anecdote was personal.

The prophet Nathan introduced his sermon to King David by a story which seemed to imply a personal knowledge of the related features or facts. It was not a personal anecdote, however, but merely a parable, albeit a striking and forceful one, and it had its intended effect: "And David's anger being exceedingly kindled . . ." (2 Kings, 12:5). This introduction was sufficiently brief, very striking; and the transition was equally forceful and direct: "Thou art the man!" But we may well conjecture that, could Nathan have truly declared himself an eye-witness of the parabolic occurrence, his introduction would have gained still greater strength as an anecdote.

A personal anecdote is best, but any anecdote is good, even in the form of a parable. The mind is enabled to contemplate a picture, to consider concrete things, and is thus freed from puzzling abstractions requiring thought and concentration of mind. The Blessed Fisher offers us a third form of the concrete, in the opening words of his sermon on the Fourth Penitential Psalm.

Imagine a man suspended by a weak slender cord or line over a very deep pit, in the bottom of which were every kind of ravenous and cruel beasts, waiting eagerly his fall, that they might devour him! Would not that man be in great peril and jeopardy, especially if this cord that he hung by was held up and stayed only by the hand of that man unto whom, by his manifold ingratitudes, he had behaved as an enemy? Likewise, dear friends, consider within yourselves, if now there were under me a deep pit wherein were lions, tigers, and bears, gaping with open mouths to destroy and devour me at my downfall, and if there were nothing whereby I might be held up in but only a broken bucket, which should hang by a small cord, held by the hands only of him to whom I have behaved myself as an enemy and an adversary, by great and grievous injuries done by me unto him: would you not think me in a dangerous condition? Yes, without doubt. Truly this is the case of us all. For under us is the horrible and fearful pit of hell. . . .

The interest flags considerably when we are asked to "imagine" a scene, for, like children, we desire a story, whether true or false, real or imaginary. Nevertheless, the picture thus painted offers something for the imagination to dwell upon, and Fisher's introduction to this Fourth Penitential Psalm attracts the reader much more readily and effectively than that of any other of his sermons on the Seven Psalms. Their introductions are solid, informative, scholastic, but hardly attractive. Still, Fisher

varies the form of introduction, and thus, in some measure, offers the pleasure of variety.

In the fourth place, St. Paul's introduction was preparatory in nature to the whole body of his discourse. He was to tell his audience about the supreme Creator of all things, who is not like unto the gold or silver or stone fashioned by the graving of art and the device of men, but is a Spirit not to be served by men's hands as if He had need of anything. The Unknown God was unlike any of their gods—and the altar which St. Paul had seen, furnished him with suitable topics on these heads. His introduction was, as we have seen, also preparatory in respect of the auditory, for it disposed that auditory to benevolent attention and conducted it gently and unobtrusively toward the end or object to be attained by the speaker. If St. Paul had not had the happy inspiration to make the altar the single thought of his introduction, he might perhaps have commented upon the marvelous art of Athens, and upon the numerous religious sects that disputed there, and then have declared that, whilst art and logic are helpful to men, even more serious affairs should engage the earnest attention of reasonable beings, namely the grand questions of Whence and Whither, such as Carlyle, nineteen centuries after, propounded to himself. Such an intro-

duction might have stirred the people to attention, but it would not have led directly and quietly to the topics he wished to treat.

Finally, St. Paul's brief, kindly, striking and preparatory introduction had the crowning virtue of easy modulation or transition into the body of his discourse. Athens had its altar to the Unknown God? Very well, it is of Him that St. Paul would now treat—and the Apostle does so, employing rather positive statements than argumentatively negative ones, avoiding contentiousness in word or manner, again playing courteous tribute to the glory of Athens and its humanistic tastes by quoting its own poets ("For we also are his offspring").

The sermon at Athens has furnished us with five points for the introduction of any discourse. Cicero's third requisite that it should render our audience *dociles,* fails at times in the case of a sermon, for the question of divine grace is here involved as well as that of the perverse will of men. St. Paul failed largely to achieve the impression he had hoped for, although he made some notable converts.

It is practically impossible, or at all events inadvisable, to construct a set form or mechanism for the introduction, although Demosthenes and Cicero are credited [5] with having done so:

[5] Hervey, *A System of Christian Rhetoric,* p. 305.

If antiquity has not misinformed us, both Demosthenes and Cicero were in the habit of preparing at their leisure different introductions to be prefixed to their extemporaneous orations. They thus secured variety but at the expense of pertinence. That kind of exordium which might be adapted to several causes was in Quintilian's time regarded with little favor, and was called *vulgar* (vulgare), although he admits that it was not always avoided by the greatest orators. Some old rhetorician or other has compared such *exordia* to the sword used at the temple of Delphi, which served the double purpose of immolating the sacred victims and executing malefactors.

Variety is desirable, indeed, but there must also be pertinence. Our greatest fault, however, is probably that of sameness, lack of variety. Our congregations may listen once or twice with patience to the formula, "In the Gospel selection which our Holy Mother the Church reads in the Mass of this Sunday, our Divine Lord reminds us," etc.; or "Of all the virtues that adorn the soul of the true Christian, purity (or modesty, or humility, or charity, or prudence, or temperance, etc. *ad libitum*) is the one," etc. Once or twice may our auditors listen to such an introduction with patience. But the custom is as repellent as meals that never vary. Variety is the spice of life.

In the attempt to achieve this variety, there is the obvious danger of categorization. Gospel narratives will form one category, with some

such introduction as I have just illustrated. The virtues will form another, with a new kind of formal mechanism. The vices, still another. The mysteries of the faith, a fourth kind, and so on. Neale uses the word "tedious" in referring to Mr. Simeon's one-and-twenty volumes of "Horae Homileticae," considered "evidently" by their author as "the greatest system of divinity which English theology had ever produced. And of what does it consist? Of several thousand sermons treated exactly in the same ways, in obedience to the same laws, and of much about the same length. Claude's essay had laid down certain rules, and Simeon's discourses were their exemplification. The laws were as invariable for the pulpit as was Dr. Watts' recipe for a prayer . . ." Neale[6] continues:

> In like manner, Mr. Simeon's type of sermons may very easily be described. The preacher opens with a short view of the circumstances under which the text was spoken. This is a very convenient exordium, because it fills two or three pages with but little trouble. The clergyman has only to put Scripture language into his own, and he is fairly launched in his sermon without any effort. Another almost equally easy method of opening is found in drawing a contrast between the person or thing of which the passage in hand speaks, and that to which the writer

[6] Neale, *Mediæval Preachers and Mediæval Preaching*, p. lxvii.

may wish to allude. And it has this special advantage: that if he is unlucky in finding much likeness between the two, he is sure to discover a good deal of *un*likeness, and either treatment will supply a good number of words.

Only the most general suggestions can be given for the composition of an introduction. The style is the man, and the well-read, imaginative, careful and earnest preacher will strike out for himself the pathway that shall best secure the benevolent attention and the docile attitude of his hearers. The fault to avoid is sameness, for that is the death of interest. Hervey illustrates [7] abundantly the varied introduction of Moses and the prophets, and especially of Our Lord. As to these last:

Our Divine Master has left us a variety of exordia. On one occasion He begins with a declaration that a certain prophecy is fulfilled by Himself; on another with a denunciation of the Pharisees (Luke 11:29); on another with the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3; see also Luke 15:3). Now He foretells His death (Matt. 16: 21–28); now He gives His disciples the acted parable of setting a child down before them (Matt. 17:2). Then again He announces in a metaphor a startling truth (John 8:12); and again He utters a warning against the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:1). Sometimes His sermons commence with answers to questions (Matt. 24:3). But of all His exordia that of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.

[7] Hervey, *op. cit.*, pp. 303–4.

5:3–16) is the most remarkable. Spoken as it was to the uninstructed disciples, most of whom entertained Hebrew notions respecting the kingdom of God, nothing could have been so opportune as to give them at the outset correct ideas of the *character, condition, position,* and *influence* of those who possess this kingdom. Tholuck calls our attention to the fact that, as when He announced Himself at Nazareth He read Isa. 61:1, and declared that it was fulfilled in Him, so here ver. 3 relates to the first and ver. 4 to the second of the sixty-first chapter. The thoughts of this introduction are not only linked to each other, but also to the body of the sermon. Here, likewise, He indirectly attacks Pharisaical piety by showing that in all actions God chiefly regards the dispositions of the heart.

The introduction should be sufficiently striking to solicit attention, but should not, except in unusual circumstances, approach the *bizarre.* In one of Segneri's Lenten sermons, he begins: "Hell, or penance." A retreat-master once began his meditation for seminarians with the startling request: "Consider yourselves in hell." The day happened to be exhaustingly hot, and the chapel exceedingly hot and stuffy. That meditation was remembered for a whole year afterward. Dean Swift's charity sermon is famous for its *bizarrerie* both in style and in length.

Here, again, the counsel to listen attentively to famous preachers and to read their best sermons will apply. *Consule probatos auctores!*

VIII

THE OPENING TEXT

TWO recently published volumes of homiletics have little to say concerning the opening text of the sermon. Father O'Dowd [1] discussed the proper method of treating Scriptural texts in general, and thus implicitly included the initial text, but gave it no special consideration. Monsignor Meyenberg's few words may be quoted [2] in full:

> The text of the sermon should not be a *mere motto,* selected on the pulpit steps, but the central idea of the sermon, generally expressed by a Scriptural text, eventually also by a liturgical text. The liturgical texts are also mostly Scriptural texts. The text of a festive sermon may first be announced in Latin and then in the vernacular. The word is thus taken, in the fullest sense, from out of the mouth of the Church, and the attention is, furthermore, drawn to the vernacular translation.

Much smaller manuals of Catholic homiletics accord much larger space to a discussion of the

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[1] O'Dowd, *Preaching* (1919).

[2] Meyenberg, *Homiletic and Catechetic Studies* (Eng. tr., 1919), p. 751.

initial text. One interesting question is: Does this text confer on the sermon any authority additional to that which the Catholic priest, from his very office and mission as authorized by his ecclesiastical superior to preach, already possesses in a general way? We might suppose that Meyenberg favors such a view, as he lays stress on taking the word "out of the mouth of the Church" and, if the Latin be quoted, "in the fullest sense" out of that mouth.

Does the text in any way authenticate our mission? Father Potter says:[3]

> In opening our sermon with a passage from Holy Writ we, as it were, present our credentials to our flock, and proclaim our right to speak as the ambassadors of Him whose word it is, whilst at the same time we secure for ourselves and our discourse an amount of reverent attention which no mere words of our own could possibly gain.

Commenting on this view, Father Feeney remarks[4] with some apparent acerbity, although with logical exactness:

> A Catholic preacher needs no "credentials to his flock," except the authorization, or mission, of his ecclesiastical superior. Even though he did need it, a text of Scripture could in no sense supply it. . . . The truth is, that non-Catholics, having no ecclesiasti-

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[3] Potter, *Sacred Eloquence*, ch. vii, sec. 1.
[4] Feeney, *Manual of Sacred Rhetoric*, p. 109.

cal mission to preach, find a convenient substitute in a Bible text. Hence, to be consistent, they must allow to all who can quote one the right to speak as the ambassador of Christ. On the contrary, the Catholic Church has her credentials to preach from the lips of our Saviour Himself: *You have not chosen me,* He says, *but I have chosen you; and have appointed you, that you should go, and should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain.* Because of this divine mission, coming through apostolic succession from Jesus Christ, our preachers have never recognized any *necessity* of beginning their sermons with passages of Holy Writ.

This criticism would apply with almost equal force to Schuech's declaration:[5]

The practice of opening with a text . . . at once authenticates, so to speak, the sacred character of the preacher as the herald of the divine word.

Although the expression of thought by both Potter and Schuech was not quite felicitous, they may have meant merely a rhetorical elaboration of the thought of St. Francis de Sales in his famous Letter on Preaching[6] addressed to the Archbishop of Bourges:

The first part of the matter is the texts from Scripture, which, in truth, hold the most important place, and form the foundation of the edifice; for in short we preach the word of God, and our teach-

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[5] Schuech-Luebbermann, *The Priest in the Pulpit* (Eng. tr.), p. 141.

[6] *Instructions on Preaching* (tr. Boyle), p. 50.

ing rests on authority. *Ipse dixit, Haec dicit Dominus,* said all the prophets; and our Lord Himself said, *Doctrina mea non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me.*

Doubtless it is in the same sense that Longhaye declares [7] of the initial text that it is "le point de départ logique du discours et sa raison d'être; *il en fait l'autorité.*" It gives the sermon *authority,* authenticates it (as it were) as a divine message to men.

The precise-minded Bourdaloue seems,[8] in his great Passion Sermon on the words of St. Paul (1 Cor. 1: 22-24), to claim for his text a similar power of authentication. He intends to show that the humiliating death of Christ was really a demonstration of His divine wisdom and power:

> Yes, it is true that Jesus Christ suffered and died. But yet, in speaking to you of those sufferings and of that death, I do not hesitate to advance a proposition which you would treat as a paradox *if the words of my text had not disposed you to listen to it with respect.*

Bourdaloue was speaking from a Christian pulpit. He had (to quote the words of Feeney) "the authorization, or mission, of his ecclesiastical superior"; and the person, the place, the

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[7] Longhaye, *La Prédication,* p. 304. Italics ours.
[8] Eng. tr. in O'Mahony, *Great French Sermons* (First Series), p. 3. Italics ours.

occasion, should have sufficed to compel the logical-minded auditory to listen "with respect" to his proposition. He nevertheless directed the attention of his hearers to the supporting quality of his Scriptural text.

Speaking with all literalness, it is indeed true that the congregation recognizes the priest as the ambassador of Christ. He needs no Bible text—or liturgical text, for that matter—by way of credentials or authentication of his mission. Nevertheless, the text has its own proper value. It stimulates attention, it bespeaks reverence, it contributes unction.

Father Feeney's remark that "non-Catholics, having no ecclesiastical mission to preach, find a convenient substitute in a Bible text," may mislead us. Protestant preachers do not—certainly not universally—consider a Bible text necessary for a sermon by way of credentials or authentication. Thus Vinet,[9] one of the most highly esteemed among Protestant authors and preachers, did not regard the text as essential:

> And in truth it is not. What gives a Christian character to a sermon is not the use of a text, but the spirit of the preacher. A sermon may be Christian, edifying, instructing, without containing even one passage of holy scripture. It may be very biblical without a text, and with a text not biblical at all.

[9] Vinet, *Homiletics, or the Theory of Preaching* (Eng. tr., N. Y., 1861), p. 96.

Thus, too, Hoppin admits [10] that the minister "may preach the word of God sometimes without taking a text from the Bible"; Broadus simply remarks [11] that "taking a text is an old and well established custom from which there seems to be no good reason for departing"; Phelps [12] quotes Claus Harms as expressing the opinion that the taking of texts has been prejudicial "not only to the perfection of preaching as an art, but also to Christian knowledge and, what is more serious, to the Christian life," and further refers to William Lloyd Garrison as urging "against the custom its tendency to antiquate the pulpit"; and Etter [13] (not to multiply illustrations) declares that "there are still some preachers and authors of homiletics who speak disparagingly of the use of texts as the themes of sermons" for reasons which he then proceeds to enumerate. [14]

Must a sermon have a text? In his compendious manual [15] on preaching, Father Conway

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[10] Hoppin, *Homiletics* (rev. ed.), p. 293.

[11] Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (37th ed.), p. 21.

[12] Phelps, *The Theory of Preaching*, p. 50.

[13] Etter, *The Preacher and the Sermon*, p. 155.

[14] It is wholly unnecessary to discuss the nature of the "call" which is supposed to give the sanction of authority to Protestant preachers. Simpson discusses it in his *Lectures on Preaching* (Lect. II). The only point of interest is that preachers do not consider the Bible text as their authorization to preach, as Feeney might seem to imply.

[15] Conway, *Principles of Sacred Eloquence*, p. 24.

seems to think it must—unless the word "must" be used in Portia's sense, when she declared, "Then must the Jew be merciful," and interpreted her declaration: "The quality of mercy is not strained." We read:

> Next the preacher turns to his text, which either the gospel of the day or his common sense will suggest. It is vulgar to court singularity in the choice of a text. A text, however, must be chosen, and ought to be chosen with one of three views. (1) As a theme of exposition, a thought to be developed, a point to be enforced. (2) It may be made quite subservient, and rank only as a point of departure: St. Thomas does this occasionally in the *Summa Theologica*, as an opening to an article. (3) It may rank as the point of attainment, the whole sermon leading the people up gradually to its fulfilment. It is advisable not to run away from it altogether, but to weave it skilfully through the narrative.

The "must" here is doubtless to be understood broadly, in the sense that the use of a text is so serviceable in many ways that, although not of obligation legally or rhetorically, it is needed for obtaining the best results. The great patristic preachers sometimes used two texts, sometimes none at all. In our own times, preachers of repute have occasionally dispensed with the use of a text. To inform preachers who decline to use texts that they "must" use them is something like saying to a prisoner in his cell

that he "cannot" be put in prison for the offense charged.

It is a curious and interesting fact that whereas Catholic authors on homiletics appear to take for granted the use of an opening text, although it cannot confer upon the preacher authentication either of his mission or of his message, present-day Protestant authors spend much space in debating the advantages and the disadvantages of the initial text, as if its use were quite optional with the preacher. But Voltaire's criticism of Bourdaloue on this head is not of course admitted by Catholic preachers as justified. Neither, on the other hand, are Protestants well pleased with it.

What is the real value of the initial text? Has the criticism [16] of Voltaire any just basis in fact? He styled Bourdaloue "the first model of good preachers in Europe" and "one of the first to make reason speak in the pulpit, and always eloquently." No dislike of Bourdaloue is back of

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[16] Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, ch. xxxii: "Peut-être serait-il à souhaiter qu'en banissant de la chaire le mauvais goût qui l'avilissait, il en eût banni aussi cette coutume de prêcher sur un texte. En effet, parler longtemps sur une citation d'une ligne ou deux, se fatiguer à compasser tout son discours sur cette ligne, un tel travail paraît peu digne de la gravité de ce ministère. Le texte devient une espèce de devise, ou plutôt d'énigme, que le discours développe. Jamais les Grecs et les Romains ne connurent cet usage. C'est dans la décadence des lettres qu'il commença, et le temps l'a conservé." Quoted in Longhaye, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

the complaint that to speak long on a line or two of text, to tire one's energies in the effort to base a whole discourse on this line, was little worthy of the sober dignity of the ministry, and was indeed to make the sermon develop a motto or unravel a kind of puzzle.

Longhaye humorously comments that Voltaire, with his usual profundity, discovered one day that neither the Greeks nor the Romans were accustomed to speak on a text, but forgot to advert to the fact that the Christian orator is by his very vocation the interpreter of God's word and accordingly begins with a Scriptural oracle and undertakes the task of expounding it. Similarly, Broadus declares that the complaint arose "chiefly from the critic's want of reverence for the Bible, and ignorance of the preacher's true relation to the Bible." Phelps remarks that the critic "did not fail to appreciate the value of a pithy saying of genius as a motto of discourse. Why may not inspiration claim at least as much respect as the utterances of genius?"

But apart from all this, Voltaire's objection is extremely superficial. He is regretful that Bourdaloue's preaching reforms did not include the elimination of the text. Had he not noticed that Bourdaloue's sermons are not attenuated, hampered, "cabined, cribbed, confined" by his

texts, but rather enlarged and made wonderfully fruitful by them? that the Biblical texts are gushing fountains of refreshment? that when deeply pondered they become the preacher's guide, philosopher and friend? that they are his spiritual nourishment? that Bourdaloue's Sermon on the Passion, for instance (to which allusion has been made above), was a master work wholly based on and inspired by St. Paul's glowing words? and that the criticism signally fails of effect when uttered in an age that witnessed the great triumvirate—Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Massillon—raising the Christian pulpit to the empyrean of combined eloquence, instruction and moving power?

Did these men find the text a restraint upon their invention, a fatiguing device that made them sweat without fruitful results, a sort of puzzle which they must strive to solve and explain to a bored audience? Voltaire was singularly unhappy in his petulant criticism.

What values are to be found in a well-selected text? It is, says Meyenberg, the central idea of the sermon. It could be made to contain and beget the whole discourse, in such fashion as to make plain beforehand all the divisions or parts of the sermon, according to Longhaye. Conway considers that it may be a thought to be developed; a point to be enforced; an end to be

attained, the whole sermon leading up gradually to its fulfilment.

Some of its advantages are pointed out by Hoyt.[17] 1. "It creates interest in the study of the Scriptures." Longhaye speaks of a preacher known to him, who was querulously asked why he spoke so much about the Bible. "Your hearers don't know it," declared the critic. "Why then should I preach, if not to make them acquainted with it?" replied the preacher. 2. "The text helps the memory to retain the truths of the sermon"; and this applies both to the preacher and to his auditory, the more so if the text is really the well-spring of the sermon. 3. It "*limits the subject* of the sermon." A preacher may still wander far afield and treat his audience to a *cursus completus* of theology or sacred history, but it will be because he has wandered from his text, which of itself is a desirably restraining influence upon his scattering thought. 4. It "promotes *variety* in preaching." The Sacred Scriptures are a storehouse of varied facts, illustrations, emotions, moral exhortations, doctrinal declarations; of pithy sayings, poetical diction, imaginative rhetoric, gentle or fiery eloquence; of allegories, similitudes, parables, figures; of human characters, characteristics, characterizations.

[17] Hoyt, *The Work of Preaching*, pp. 123–125.

Still other values are noted by Broadus: 1. The text "gives a tone of sacredness to the discourse." 2. It "awakens interest at the outset." But a study of the great triumvirate of French preachers will exhibit, better than such coldly expressed values, the rhetorical inspiration, the restraining guidance, the moral and doctrinal enforcements found in well-selected texts.

It may not be amiss in this connection to call attention to two recently-issued volumes [18] giving excellent translations into English of sermons by "the triumvirate," in which, as Dom Cabrol says in his Introduction, "the power and the glory are certainly not equally shared, but in which nevertheless they are not wholly absorbed and swallowed up by one of the triumvirs, as has often been the case in other triumvirates." Each of the volumes is prefaced by brief but vivid estimates of the homiletic and literary excellence of the orators by critics of renown, while the Introduction just alluded to, and the formal Prefaces, give much desirable information as well as undoubted stimulus of attraction to the reader.

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[18] O'Mahony, *Great French Sermons* (First Series: London, 1917. Second Series: London, Edinburgh, St. Louis, 1919).

IX

THE "ACCOMMODATED SENSE" IN SERMONS

CHARMINGLY modest and naïf, the Bishop of Belley confesses [1] that once when preaching in the presence of St. Francis de Sales he used the text, *Cum electo electus eris, et cum perverso perverteris* (2 Kings, 22:27), and applied it to "the contagion of evil company, a comparison not unfrequently made. I saw at once that he was not pleased, and when we were next alone together, he asked me why I had distorted this passage, knowing its literal meaning. I replied that such an application might be inferred; but he maintained that at all events I ought to have said that this was not the literal meaning, which refers solely to God, Who is merciful to those that are good, and stern to such as are evil. You can gather from this how particular he was himself, being always so much more indulgent to others than to himself."

[1] Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales* (Eng. tr., New York, 1876), p. 346.

St. Francis "objected [2] to a preacher rushing straight to the mystical interpretation of Holy Scripture, without first explaining the literal meaning; a method which he likened to trying to raise the roof before digging the foundation. 'Holy Scripture should be treated more seriously and reverently; it is not a piece of stuff to be cut and shaped into any kind of garment men please,' he used to say. When the actual sense of the words had been explained, he allowed mystical and moral interpretations, but even then judiciously, and not strained to the utmost. He used to say that such overdrawn applications were like a *carillon* of bells, which may be imagined to say whatever one wills."

The counsel of the Saint is obviously both honest and safeguarding. The preacher must first have apprehended the literal meaning, lest he use a text argumentatively in a probative sense which it was not meant to bear. How shall we obtain this true meaning? The Saint again helps [3] us:

> It is the Holy Spirit of God Who has given us the Scriptures; the same Holy Spirit opens their true meaning to us, and that only through the Church, which is the temple and pillar of Truth: the Church, by whose means the Holy Spirit has kept and pre-

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *The Spiritual Letters of St. Francis de Sales* (Eng. tr., N. Y., 1876), p. 187.

served the true letter of Scripture; the Church, which alone has the gift of the Spirit of Truth to interpret it. And therefore he who would seek the real meaning of that Heavenly Word, apart from its guardian the Church, will never find it; he who would seek it independently of her, finds a vain delusion instead of the truth; he is misled by the evil one, who knows how to transform himself into the appearance of an angel of light. It was this which all the heretics of old did, pretending to a better interpretation of Holy Scripture than that taught by the Church, to whom her Crucified Spouse has committed the precious trust.

We have read more than once the substance of these saintly cautions in our text-books, but the Saint had the most attractive way of clothing that substance, and his rules will accordingly bear repetition.

Bishop Camus's impugned text reads, in Challoner's translation: "With the elect, thou wilt be elect: and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted." In some such interpretation had the Bishop used it in his sermon. He defended himself, declaring that his application of the text to a human being, and away from God, "might be inferred." One wonders how? The matter is one rather of mistranslation than of misinterpretation. With the perverse, a man might become "perverted." Can we speak of God becoming "perverted" in His dealings with sinners? He can appear very much *changed* to-

ward them, when, falling from grace, they cease to be His friends and become His enemies. If, by capital letters, we clearly mean to address God—e. g., "With the elect, Thou wilt be elect: and with the perverse Thou wilt be perverted" —our ideas of "elect" and "perverted" undergo a subtle but profound change. The recently published Jewish translation [4] of the Old Testament meets the difficulty partly by the use of capitals, partly by a change of wording from the Authorized Version or the Revised Version (neither of which uses capitals): "With the pure Thou dost show Thyself pure; And with the crooked Thou dost show Thyself subtle"—language which indeed could not be "inferred" to apply to the purifying or corrupting influences of good or bad companions respectively.

There was less necessity for such a misinterpretation or distortion, since the Bishop could have expressed his thought with literal apostolic sanction in the words of St. Paul: *Corrumpunt mores bonos colloquia mala* (1 Cor., 15:33).

It is interesting to note that Gigot,[5] without referring to the anecdote of Bishop Camus, should illustrate the "accommodative sense" of Scriptural texts by this example:

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[4] Philadelphia, 1917.

[5] Gigot, *General Introd. to the Study of the Scriptures,* pp. 390–391.

It is not always easy to distinguish between the typical, and another sense, which is called *accommodative,* because it consists in the *accommodation* or application of the Scripture to something, of which there is no question in the passage quoted, either in the literal or in the mystical sense. This accommodation or adaptation of the sacred words to an object to which they have no real reference may be made in two ways. One by extending their meaning to some matter like to that of which they really speak; as, for instance, if one would excuse his fault by saying in the words of Eve, "Serpens decepit me" (Gen. 3:13); the other way is by applying the words of a passage to some subject quite foreign and unlike to that which is spoken of in Holy Writ; as, for instance, if any one quoted the words of Ps. 17:26, "Cum sancto sanctus eris," intending thereby to point out the beneficial effects of good company for a man, whereas in the text there is question of something entirely different, viz.: of God showing Himself kind and merciful to the kind and merciful man.

This appears to be the text as quoted by the Bishop of Belley: *Cum sancto sanctus eris, et cum perverso perverteris.* As given in the Vulgate, it occurs both in 2 Kings, 22:26, 27 and in Ps. 17:26, 27, and combines in one quotation parts of each verse—a curious mixture. In 2 Kings it occurs thus:

26: *Cum sancto sanctus eris*: et cum robusto perfectus.
27: Cum electo electus eris: *et cum perverso perverteris.*

In the Psalm it occurs thus:

26: *Cum sancto sanctus eris:* et cum viro innocente innocens eris.
27: Et cum electo electus eris: *et cum perverso perverteris.*

One ventures to wonder if this be not rather an example of mistranslation than of accommodation, quite similar to the ludicrous feat attributed to Rowland Hill, who is said to have used the text "Top-(k)not come down" (Matt. 24:17) in preaching against the head-dress of women (and, in particular, of Mrs. Rowland Hill). Does not Tertullian's warning[6] apply here: *Verba non sono solo sapiunt, sed et sensu: nec auribus tantummodo audienda sunt, sed et mentibus?* Have we not something like a play upon words—a sort of solemn punning—when we not merely divert their application but "distort" (to use the expression of St. Francis de Sales) their meaning?

A sentence may be properly translated although its meaning, when unrelated to its context, may be misapprehended. On the other hand, a sentence may be thoroughly misunderstood because one of its words has been mistranslated. "Give me souls"—and let who will take everything else: 'tis a beautiful and emo-

[6] *Adv. Gnos. Scorpiace,* Cap. 7.

tional cry of the mystic. *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle tibi.* Thus spake the king of Sodom to Abram as he returned victorious (Gen. 14:21). But *animas* does not mean *souls* in that sense, but simply living persons. The king wished to reward Abram with all the spoils of war, reserving merely the persons—the king's subjects—whom he had rescued. Challoner has "persons."

Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis (Ps. 67:36). True enough it is that God is wonderful in His saints—but the verse does not say this. *Sanctis* is neuter and refers not to people but to the places where the ark had been located before attaining its permanent sanctuary. "God is wonderful in His saints" is nevertheless the translation given in Challoner.

The danger of attending merely to words and not to meanings is illustrated in the application to the Sacred Heart of the words: "Man shall come to a deep heart: and God shall be exalted" (Ps. 63:7, 8). The "deep heart" is not that of Christ, but of the crafty ("deep"), subtle and malicious sinner. Challoner has here a footnote: "*A deep heart.* That is, crafty, subtle, deep projects and designs; which nevertheless shall not succeed, for God *shall be exalted* in bringing them to nought by his wisdom and power."

Idiomatic language offers its own special difficulties. "My soul is continually in my hands" (Ps. 118:109) means in the Hebraic figure, not that the Psalmist is always ready to render account of his actions to God, but that he is in danger of death, carries his life in his hands, somewhat, perhaps, as imprudent folk are said to wear their faith on their sleeves:

> There are a number of texts commonly used in this inaccurate way; and a few years ago a French theologian gathered about a hundred and fifty of them from French books of sermons.[7] A number of the specimens he adduces are not used thus, so far as I know, by English preachers. . . . Among the collection there are some which we do use in the same inaccurate sense as our neighbors. . . .[8]

Not all is plain sailing, however, for the preacher who, determined to avoid the use of an accommodated sense which is based on a misconception of the meaning of the original, has provided himself with a volume such as that of Bainvel. There is, for instance, the text, "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Matt. 11:12). A footnote in Challoner's Bible takes the trouble—the foot-notes there are rare—to interpret the pas-

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[7] Bainvel, *Les Contresens Bibliques des Prédicateurs.*

[8] O'Dowd, *Preaching*, p. 139. He gives seventeen examples from Bainvel.

sage for us: "It is not to be obtained but by main force, by using violence upon ourselves, by mortification and penance, and resisting our perverse inclinations." That is, indeed, the preacher's ordinary way of insisting, with Scriptural warrant, upon the necessity of mortification. He will accordingly be surprised, in reading Longhaye,[9] to come upon this view:

> We are told, in order to stimulate our courage, that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and that the violent bear it away. To elevate thus into a maxim the words of the Gospel, they are taken from their context and, at the same time, are changed in meaning. The divine Master, eulogizing His Precursor, states that "from the days of John the Baptist," from the beginning of his ministry, a great throng sought entrance into the kingdom of heaven and that it was taken as by assault. Can we suppose that our Saviour wished to utter at once two thoughts, to announce a fact and to place a practical law? But his words apply distinctly to one epoch, one determinate condition. Generalizing the words changes their meaning, for he could not have said that, "from the days of John the Baptist," the winning of heaven had become more difficult than before. And thus, in order to assert a truth which is otherwise evident, an oracle is invoked in which it is very difficult to find the truth contained. And, meanwhile, what is more commonly in use than this interpretation?

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[9] Longhaye, *La Prédication* (2nd ed.), p. 301.

We turn to O'Dowd,[10] and we find:

"The Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away" (Matt. 11:12). This saying of Our Lord is enigmatical, but the true explanation is not that the Kingdom of heaven is only obtained at the price of violent mortification. Two interpretations are suggested—the first, that Our Lord was pointing to the storming of the citadel of the new Kingdom by sinners and publicans; and the second, that He was alluding to the persecution begun by the scribes and Pharisees, who were attempting to destroy the new Kingdom of God from the face of the earth.

The common homiletical view asserted without intimation of any other possible view, in Challoner's Bible, is as roundly rejected by Longhaye and O'Dowd. The puzzled preacher next consults Callan,[11] who mentions neither of the two interpretations allowed by O'Dowd, but instead exclusively gives the view expressed by Challoner:

The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence; i. e., all who enter the Church and live according to its teaching must suffer much and do violence to their own passions. Only those who thus exercise great efforts can live the life of a Christian and finally bear away the prize of eternal life.

Maas,[12] on the other hand, seems to restrict

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[10] O'Dowd, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[11] Callan, *The Four Gospels*, p. 73.
[12] Maas, *The Life of Jesus Christ*, etc. (1st ed.), p. 53.

the application to the time when Our Lord was speaking; in so far he agrees with Longhaye:

> *The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence*—is usually understood in a good sense, of the zeal for the kingdom of God, excited by the preaching of John. This opinion is founded on what immediately follows, where John is compared to Elias, the prophet.

The sermonizer turns to MacEvilly,[13] and finds a fairly extensive comment, too long to be quoted here. *Inter alia,* he declares that the words may mean what we find in Callan, and what Longhaye and O'Dowd declare they do not mean; and he refers to another interpretation of Maldonatus and other commentators, who say that "the meaning is, that the 'kingdom of heaven' is a prize; no longer, as in the Old Law, a matter of hereditary right, confined to the chosen people, but open to all, so that all may compete for it, and successfully carry it off. '*Many shall come from the east and west,*' etc. (Matt. 8:11, 12)."

Le Camus refers[14] the meaning exclusively to the time of Christ:

> "And," continues Jesus, "from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away. For

[13] MacEvilly, *An Exposition of the Gospels,* Matt., p. 207.
[14] Le Camus, *The Life of Christ,* Vol. I, p. 436.

all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And, if you will receive it, he is the Elias that is to come." Thus announcing the close of the theocratic era and the official opening of the Messianic era, He declares that man must think no more of the past unless it be to hail its fulfilment in the present, and that now the true Israelites have only to enter freely into the Kingdom of God. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!" says Jesus, as if to point out the decisive importance of his final words.

Similarly, we find Pope[15] illustrating the accommodated sense by the one example (already quoted) of Psalm 63:7, 8: "Man shall come to a deep heart" etc. These words, he says, "may be taken as expressing certain aspects of devotion to the Sacred Heart, but we have no right to say that this meaning was ever intended by the Holy Spirit." On the other hand, O'Dowd remarks: "Some Biblical theologians consider the application of these words to the Sacred Heart as nothing short of a material sin of blasphemy. The 'deep heart' spoken of is the malicious heart of the sinner" (page 141).

Meanwhile, to use Scripture in an accommodated sense is not only permissible but desirable. In doing so we follow the example set by the New Testament in several places, by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, by approved

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[15] Pope, *The Catholic Student's "Aids" to the Bible*, p. 69.

ascetical writers, by the Liturgy of the Church. The Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* reminds us: "Neither should those passages be neglected which the Fathers have understood in an allegorical or figurative sense, more especially when such interpretation is justified by the literal, and when it rests on the authority of many. For this method of interpretation has been received by the Church from the Apostles, and has been approved by her own practice, as the holy Liturgy attests; although it is true that the holy Fathers did not thereby pretend directly to demonstrate dogmas of faith, but used it as a means of promoting virtue and piety, such as, by their own experience, they knew to be most valuable." Meyenberg offers us [16] good advice respecting the use of the accommodated sense:

> There is, furthermore, a homiletic *sensus accommodatus cum fundamento in re.* Certain passages, truths, and facts of Holy Scripture may be applied without any artificial means to certain circumstances of life as a model, a rule, a measure, a consolation, an encouragement, or a reproach, because the substance and the deeper spirit of the Scriptural words suit also such positions, though not all conditions, consequences, and requirements of these latter applications are directly contained in the text itself. . . .

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[16] Meyenberg, *Homiletic and Catechetic Studies,* pp. 155-6.

He notes that the *sensus accommodatus*: (*a*) "never offers a dogmatic scriptural proof"; (*b*) "must not violate the literal sense"; (*c*) "must be free from all trifling with art, from playfulness, from a frivolous sensitiveness, and from an intemperate moral affectation of exposition which constantly forsakes the verbal meaning and strays off into by-ways."

St. Francis told the Bishop of Belley that, in case a preacher means to use a text in some other than the literal sense, the people should first of all be so advised.

One might almost fancy that Broadus [17] had in mind this cautionary anecdote when he wrote:

> To interpret and apply his text in accordance with its real meaning, is one of the preacher's most sacred duties. . . . This would seem to be a truism. But it is often and grievously violated. Not only is there much contented ignorance as to interpretation, and much careless neglect on the part of persons well able to interpret correctly, and much wild spiritualizing of plain words, but, by a violent method of "accommodation," Scripture sentences or phrases are employed as signifying what it is well known, and perhaps even declared at the time, that the sacred writer did not mean to say, and has not at all said. "The original meaning of these words, as used by the inspired writer, is—so and so; but I propose on the present occasion to employ them in the following sense." That is to say—honored brother, see

[17] Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (37th ed.), pp. 32-3.

what you are doing—you stand up to teach men from a passage of God's blessed Word, and coolly declare that you propose to make the passage mean what it does not mean. "But the words might have that sense" [the Bishop of Belley pleaded to St. Francis that his accommodated sense "might be inferred"]. They might, but as a part of the Bible, as a text of Scripture, they *do not*. . . .

Protestant works on homiletics generally insist so earnestly on giving only the exact literal interpretation to any Scriptural text, that one is naturally interested, not to say amused, to find the Rev. Dr. John Hall,[18] almost in the one breath, both arraigning the Scholastics for ignorance of the Bible and forthwith misinterpreting the Bible himself. He does this in his Yale Lectures on Preaching for 1875. He speaks of the two methods of pursuing knowledge. "In the one the inquirer forms a theory, and then looks around for the facts to fit into it. . . . On the other, he collects his facts, and enough of them, and builds up his theory on them":

Practical Rome was more inclined to this method. With the introduction of Christianity, the human mind received a mighty impetus, and, as we see in the vigorous preaching of Augustine, turned to the way of dealing with the data, and founding on them the theory. With the growth of superstition, the Aristotelian method was resumed, and we get to the elaborate trifling of the Schoolmen, whose theology

[18] Hall, *God's Word Through Preaching*, pp. 190-192.

resembled, in subtlety and in want of foundation, the Greek philosophy. The Reformation broke up these cardboard castles that men had constructed, and sent them after the fashion of Augustine to the great mass of data in the Scriptures. Bacon's inductive method set men to the study of nature. . . .

Now we want this Baconian method applied to the Bible-study. What facts are in nature, as in gases, in minerals, in atoms, to the student of matter, Bible texts are to the theologian. These we sift, examine, analyze, classify. . . . But working on this plan with the modesty of true science, intensified because we are dealing with the declarations of the living God, we go from strength to strength, every conquest we make being assured, and every trophy we take having inscribed on it, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory."

Did the Rev. Doctor use his method with the text he has just quoted? Did he "sift, examine, analyze, classify," after the fashion of Baconian science? As badly as any medieval Schoolman could, in the Doctor's apprehension, deal with this text, he has himself dealt with it. First, he has misquoted it, misquoted his own blessed Bible. The phrase is "unto Thy name *give* glory," and not "*be* glory" (as Dr. Hall hath it). Secondly, he has misinterpreted his text, which is not a modest ascription of praise or merit away from ourselves and to God, but a prayer for help.

It is a curious coincidence that this text should happen to be one of the few selected by the Rev.

Dr. Perowne for special comment in his essay [19] on "Texts: Their Interpretation, Misinterpretation, and Misapplication." Discussing the literal interpretation of Scriptural texts, he gives several illustrations of misapprehension of their meaning:

> How often, again, are the words of the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory," employed as an ascription of praise, not only in the *Non nobis, Domine* of the musician, but in the more sober discourse of the preacher! Not uncommonly, too, a word is changed in the quotation, the memory aiding and abetting by its inaccuracy the misconception of the mind: "Not unto us, O Lord," so it runs, "*be* (instead of 'give') the praise." Whereas, in the Psalmist's use of them, the words are an earnest prayer for help, and that prayer urged not on the plea of our merit, but of God's mere mercy and of the honor of His name.
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> "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?" (Ps. cxv. 1, 2).

The Vulgate's collocation of the text in the 113th Psalm would easily account for the popular interpretation, for the text is preceded by a joyful recounting of the marvels wrought by God in favor of His people, whereas the Hebrew begins a new Psalm at this point. The life [20] of the wonderful preacher, St. Bernardine

[19] Ellicott, *Homiletical and Pastoral Lectures*, p. 248.
[20] Howell, *S. Bernardino of Siena*, p. 191.

of Siena, affords us an illustration. While he was at Perugia, in 1439, Fr. Albert of Sarteano, one of the most distinguished of the Observants, passed through on his way to Florence, conducting Jacobite representatives who were to make their submission to Pope Eugenius:

> When Bernardino saw his disciple, Fr. Albert, mounted on a richly-caparisoned steed in the pomp of his dignity of Apostolic Nuntio . . . he cried aloud: "Brother Albert, look to thy feet. Remember death! beware lest honors exalt thy spirit beyond what is right!" . . . "In all the honors that have been offered me," was Fr. Albert's reply, "this has been my constant prayer: 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the glory!'" (Wadding, XI, 119). A chapel, now destroyed, containing portraits of the two friars, was erected as a memorial of the edifying scene.

Shakespeare uses the text also in its commonest acceptation when he makes King Henry piously ascribe to God the great victory at Agincourt (*King Henry V*, IV. viii):

> O God, thy arm was here;
> And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
> Ascribe we all. . . . Take it, God,
> For it is none but thine! . . .
> Come, go we in procession to the village;
> And be it death proclaimed through our host,
> To boast of this, or take that praise from God
> Which is his only . . .
> Let there be sung *Non Nobis* and *Te Deum*.

On the other hand, in view of the popularity of the *Non nobis,* occurring as it does in the Sunday Vespers and thus being rendered familiar to the people in translation as well as to the clergy in Latin, the strange thing is that it has not been used even more frequently. One is pleased, in reading the life[21] of Father Ravignan, to see that its use is avoided where we might naturally expect to find it. The great preacher had succeeded wonderfully in the Retreat which he had founded in connection with his Conferences at Notre Dame, and the General of the Jesuits, Fr. Roothaan, felicitated him: "What a happiness! *Deo gratias* a thousand times. You are right, Father; God has helped you visibly, as you very well say. I am so fond of the words of St. Peter, after the miraculous draft of fishes: 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' This was a new grace of God. *Ne dona Dei nos extollant.*" This was rather different from the comment which Shakespeare places on the lips of the other General who had won success at Agincourt.

Inasmuch as the present chapter deals with Scripture texts, perhaps some notice should be taken of the curious view expressed of the

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[21] Ponlevoy, *Life of Father de Ravignan* (Eng. tr.), p. 151.

Schoolmen by Dr. John Hall, as quoted above. Those Aristotelians, it seems, did not go to the Bible for the data with which to build up their theological theses. But the good Doctor doubtless had not consulted the *Index of Biblical Authorities* accompanying the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas, the Schoolman of the Schoolmen, the Aristotelian *par excellence.* Elsewhere [22] I have dealt with this blundering ignorance, but a pertinent quotation may suffice here. That *Index* shows us that:

> In the whole Bible there are but five books which he does not quote—Abdias (one chapter), Habacuc (three chapters), Sophonias (three chapters), Aggeus (two chapters), Philemon (one chapter); and all of them added together are not equal in length to the short book of Tobias. From the first chapter of Genesis he makes some thirty-one quotations, and explicates them in various places of his Summa in the aggregate over eighty times. We glance at the references in the *Index* to the second chapter of Genesis, and we find a similar fertility. Of the fifty chapters in Genesis, he omits but nine. We glance at Exodus, and find not a chapter omitted of all the forty. Of the twenty-seven chapters of Leviticus, only one is omitted.

And so the tale runs, too lengthily to be followed further. Dr. Hall's arraignment of the Aristotelian Schoolmen because they did not

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[22] Henry, *The "Original Sources" of European History,* p. 23.

go to the Bible for their data, marvelously ignorant of the facts as it is, is made still more ludicrous by the fact that the one Biblical quotation in which he himself indulges in this connection, is both misquoted and misinterpreted.

The present chapter does not pretend to cover the large question of various "senses" of Scripture tests. St. Francis de Sales has accordingly been quoted only slightly and in a restricted relation. His works nevertheless furnish Father Isenring, O.S.F.S., with a basis for the construction of a work on Hermeneutics.[23]

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[23] Isenring, *Hermeneutics, or Rules for Interpreting the Vulgate, according to the Mind of St. Francis de Sales* (1915), 109 pp.

X

SERMON ILLUSTRATION

IN HIS famous work on *The Dark Ages,* Maitland begins by throwing light on the meaning of the word *dark* when applied to the years 800-1200. The word is comparative or relative in its nature. We easily think of the superlative *In Darkest Africa* by a later writer. Maitland expressed his belief that the degree of darkness in the epoch he was treating had been greatly exaggerated by various historians. He is not, however, content with this simple and exact declaration, but proceeds [1] to bring the fact home to his readers by a happy illustration:

> I dare say you have observed that, in a certain state of twilight, as soon as you have lighted only a taper in your chamber, it seems quite dark out of doors. Yet, perhaps, you have only just come into the house out of that which, if not broad daylight, was nevertheless such good serviceable twilight as that, while you were in it, you never once thought of darkness, or of losing your way, or not being able to see what you were about; yet, I say, as soon as

[1] Maitland, *The Dark Ages* (New Edition, 1889), p. 22.

ever you lighted, were it only a rushlight, in your chamber, all the look-out was darkness. Were you ever so misled as to open the window, and tell the people in the road that they would certainly lose their way, and break their shins—nay, even to condole with, or triumph over, those inevitable consequences of their wandering about in pitch-darkness? I very much doubt it; if you had attempted it, I feel quite confident that, if from being at a loss for an exordium, or for any other reason, you had been obliged to wait with your head out at window until your eyes had recovered from the glare of your own little candle, you would have seen that there was *some* light abroad—you would have begun to distinguish houses, and highways, and sober people going about their business in a way which showed that they could see enough for common purposes—and you would have held your tongue and drawn in your head, rather pleased that you had not exposed yourself.

The period of A. D. 800-1200 might appear dark to the increased knowledge and comfort of the nineteenth century, and yet the people of that earlier period may have lived better and happier (and mayhap, as Frederick Stokes points out in his Introduction to the New Edition of Maitland's work), more comfortable lives in the mass, than the people of the more brilliant century. Excellent as the illustration is on this point, it is even happier in its sly digs at the historians who not only painted the period in the darkest colors but sneered or chuckled or guffawed at the supposed blunder-

ings and gropings of the good folk of that remote day.[2]

It may not be amiss to signalize *en passant* another notable feature of the illustration. The author on occasion could wield a vigorous pen and could attain a noble and glowing rhetoric. His illustration, nevertheless, uses throughout the simplest language, not disdaining to speak of people breaking their shins or going about their daily business unconcernedly in the deepening twilight. The phraseology is quite pedestrian. Simplicity, kindly shrewdness, pertinency, perfect intelligibility—these are characteristic of the style employed.

In this same first chapter or essay, Maitland meets the querulous objection that readers have not sufficient leisure to read all the writings of

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[2] In the Preface to the first edition, Maitland pays a most eloquent tribute to Monasticism, and continues: "This I think no man can deny. I believe it is true, and I love to think of it. I hope that I see the good hand of God in it, and the visible trace of His mercy that is over all His works. But if it is only a dream, however grateful, I shall be glad to be awakened from it; not indeed by the yelling of illiterate agitators, but by a quiet and sober proof that I have misunderstood the matter. In the meantime, let me thankfully believe that thousands of the persons at whom Robertson, and Jortin, and other such very miserable second-hand writers, have sneered, were men of enlarged minds, purified affections, and holy lives—that they were justly reverenced by men—and, above all, favorably accepted by God, and distinguished by the highest honor which He vouchsafes to those whom He has called into existence, that of being the channels of His love and mercy to their fellow-creatures."

the Dark Ages in order to discover if those ages really had some light to live by. He shows calmly just what he proposes to do in the subsequent essays, and then clinches his argument[3] with an illustration:

> By putting your head into the darkness, good reader, I do mean that you must, in some degree, make yourself acquainted with the original writers of the period. I have heard of a traveller at an inn, who wished to look out and see if it was day; and who returned to bed with a very wrong judgment on the matter, owing to his being in the dark himself, whereby he was led to open the glass door of a cupboard, instead of a window; and I must say that, in trusting to the representations of some popular writers, you will be doing much the same thing.

It will have been noticed that the first of these two illustrations was a direct appeal to the common experience of the reader—a direct appeal in the second person: "I dare say you have observed," is the exordium; and that the second illustration is a fable or parable, somewhat like the similitude used by St. James (1:23, 24), of the man who beheld himself in the glass and presently "forgot what manner of man he was."

Now in this brief first essay, Maitland gives his readers still another illustration. He has warned them not to judge the darkness too

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[3] Maitland, *loc. cit.*, p. 24.

hastily, whilst their eyes are still accustomed to a somewhat brighter light. If they put their heads into the outer darkness, let them keep their heads there awhile until the eye becomes more accustomed to the twilight. But if they try to do this vicariously—by reading what some popular historians have to tell them about the Dark Ages—they may merely accept as wrong a judgment as that of the traveler who opened the glass door of a cupboard instead of the window. Having thus encouraged the reader to go into the foreign country styled the Dark Ages, Maitland has another warning for him, and clothes it in the guise of a personal anecdote. This form of illustration is naturally the happiest of all, for everybody is more interested in the personal experiences of a speaker than in his narrative of what happened to other folk. The illustration is rather long, but perhaps my readers will bear with me if, because of a moral to be presently drawn from it in connection with the others, I quote it in full:

> Indeed, I cannot help wishing that the reader who has formed his idea of the dark ages only from some modern popular writers—I do not mean those who have written professedly on the subject—could be at once fairly thrown back into the midst of them. I cannot help thinking that he would feel very much as I did the first time that I found myself in a foreign country. A thousand novelties attracted my

attention; many were strange, and some displeasing; and there was more or less that seemed foreign in everything. For this I was prepared; but I was not prepared for another feeling which very soon, and quite unexpectedly, sprung up in my mind—"How much is different, and, go where I may, for ever changing! True; but how much is the same everywhere!" It was almost a surprise to me to find that the sun and moon went on much the same way as at home—that there were roads, and rivers, and fields, and woods, and towns, and cities, and streets, and houses filled with people who might, perhaps, talk some other language, and dress in some other fashion from mine, but who had evidently much the same notions as to the necessaries of life, and the substantials of society; and, without losing all my pride, or patriotism, or prejudice, I got a new idea of the unity of nature. I felt that He had "made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth"—it brought with it a kind of home-feeling—a sense that, wherever I wandered, I was but moving in the hollow of His hand among my own brethren.[4]

The author forthwith makes his application:

Well, and these old folks of the dark ages were our grandfathers and grandmothers; and, in a good many points, vastly like ourselves, though we may not at first see the resemblance in the few smoky family pictures which have come down to us; but had they "not eyes"? had they "not hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions—fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer" as we

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

are? "Yes; but they knew nothing." Well, then, it is strange to think how they could do and say so much as they did without any knowledge. But you do not mean quite *nothing*—you will allow that they knew the *Paternoster* and *Credo*, and that is *something*—nay, a good deal, in itself, and the pledge of a great deal more.

And now for the moral. Maitland essayed an ungrateful task for his day. The essays which make up his great work were contributed serially to the *British Magazine*. When the editor had received the first essay, containing the above-quoted illustrations, he wrote to Maitland that he should "fully rely on a perennial, or, rather, *permensal* supply." The brief first essay apologetic and explanatory in form and purpose, was really in the nature of a preface to the proposed series of papers. We may fairly surmise that its wonderful success was due, at least very largely, to its pertinent and engaging illustrations.

The readers of the *British Magazine* were presumably a grade higher in both culture and intelligence than the man in the street, but Maitland felt the desirability of much illustration of his meaning and purpose, partly in the interest of clearness, partly no doubt, in the interest of attractiveness. Learned and simple alike love pertinent illustration of any argument. The former may not exactly need it, the latter gen-

erally does need it. If the preacher should use it pertinently in his sermons, certainly none will be displeased thereat.

Preaching should be popular, in the true sense of that word. It is an address to the people, not to an academic senate, to a board of judges, to an ecclesiastical synod. Its aim is to inform the mind and to move the will. To attain this end, it must be both intelligible and attractive to the people: "Not only," says Bishop Dupanloup,[5] "must we speak to them by ideas, images and sentiments, but employ stories, experiences, familiar comparisons drawn from things that they know, that they see, and that they do every day; as our Lord Himself did. Otherwise they do not understand, they do not listen."

It is unfortunately a necessary reminder—"as our Lord Himself did." Have we anywhere a better model of the popular sermon than the Sermon on the Mount? Assuredly, it dealt with high and holy things. Its language, however, was not high-flown, technical, abstruse or abstract. It abounds in illustrative devices—in figure, comparison, story, common experiences. The disciples were the salt of the earth—but of what use is salt if it lose its savor? They were the light of the world—but men do

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[5] Dupanloup (tr. Eales), *The Ministry of Preaching*, p. 26.

not light a candle and put it under a bushel. A village may be hidden in a valley, but a city seated on a mountain-top cannot be hid. The disciples must avoid the common error of hoarding treasure where moth and rust consume and men break through and steal. They cannot serve two opposed masters. They must trust Him who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field. They must not judge harshly, seeing the mote in a brother's eye, and not the beam in their own eye. They must not cast pearls before swine, lest both they and their pearls be trampled under enraged brutish feet. They must pray with confidence to a heavenly Father, for even an earthly father does not give a stone for bread or a serpent for fish. They must enter through a narrow gate upon a strait pathway. They must beware of prophets who, masquerading as sheep, are in truth but ravening wolves. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? They must take these truths to heart if they would build their house, not upon shifting sands, but upon solid rock. A common language, glorified by the poetry of common things.

What is an illustration? Obviously, it is something intended to throw light on an argument, statement, exhortation, with the purpose of making these things clearer than they other-

wise might be—clearer, not in themselves, but to the mind that is to receive them. In preaching, therefore, we should take account of the general mentality and tastes of our auditory, and our illustrations will be best adapted to that end when they are based on familiar facts and phrased in a familiar manner. Our Lord suited His addresses to the folk that heard Him. His fishermen disciples are to leave their nets in order to become—what? His propagandists, His earthly messengers? Yes, of course; but He does not thus express His thought to them. They are to become "fishers of men." Brief as is the Gospel narrative of His sermons, the extent of His illustrations is wonderful, and they are intelligible to all men for the reason that they deal with the common knowledge of all men. Broadus [6] summarizes them well:

> It should not be forgotten that much of the choicest illustration is derived from the commonest pursuits and the most familiar experiences of life. . . . The great mass of our Lord's illustrations are drawn from ordinary human life. Of agricultural occupations, we find reference to sowing wheat and various circumstances which help or hinder its growth, to harvesting, winnowing, and putting in barns, to the management of fig-trees and vineyards, and to bottling the wine. In domestic affairs, he speaks of building houses, various duties of servants and

[6] Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, p. 232.

stewards, leavening bread, baking, and borrowing loaves late at night, of dogs under the table, patching clothes and their exposure to moth, lighting lamps, and sweeping the house. As to trade, etc., he mentions the purchase of costly pearls, finding hid treasure, money intrusted to servants as capital, lending on interest, creditors and debtors, imprisonment for debt, and tax-gathers. Among social relations, he tells of feasts, weddings, and bridal processions, the judge and the widow who had been wronged, the rich man and the beggar, the good Samaritan. Of political affairs, he alludes to kings going to war; and the Parable of the Ten Pounds (Luke 19:11, ff.) corresponds in every particular to the history of Archelaus as enacted during our Lord's childhood. The Prodigal Son is a series of the most beautiful pictures of real life. And who can think without emotion of Jesus standing in some market-place, and watching children at their sports, from which he afterward drew a striking illustration? All these form but a part of the illustrative material which, in our brief records of his teaching, we find him deriving from matters familiar to all. The lesson is obvious, but it should be pondered long; and we should not fail to remark the sweet dignity with which these common things are clothed; not one of our Lord's illustrations is ludicrous.

Schuech [7] divides illustrations into Narratives and Images (metaphor, allegory simile, parable, fable, type). Narratives may be taken from the Bible, sacred history—especially the lives of the saints—or profane history, and from personal

[7] Schuech-Luebbermann, *The Priest in the Pulpit*, pp. 110-113.

experience. Christ and the apostles made use of types (e. g. John 6:31, 1 Cor. 10:1, 2). The division is satisfactory, although it might have specifically included proverbs, literature, art, science, the trades and professions. The whole universe, indeed, and all life therein may be called upon to pay tribute to the preacher in search of enlightening comment upon the truths of religion.

Maitland has furnished us with examples. The first quotation was based on a matter of common *experience;* the second was an *allegory* or story; the third was an *anecdote.* In that same volume, he gives us other striking illustrations. Two of these may be quoted here. The first is a *supposition* (not an infrequent form with preachers) found in the first essay:

> Suppose I were to say that I am writing "in a little *dark* room," would you understand me to mean that I could not see the paper before me? Or if I should say that I was writing "on a dark day," would you think I meant that the sun had not risen by noon?

The second is subtly metaphorical, and is taken from the Preface to the first edition (the italics are mine):

> It is quite impossible to *touch* the subject of Monasticism *without rubbing off some of the dirt* which has been heaped upon it.

Maitland was all that Birrell [8] thought of him. Nevertheless, I am convinced that very much of his power to attract readers lay in his vivacious, sparkling, illustrative style. He might well be copied by preachers who are monotonous in tone or thought, scholastically accurate and arid in argumentation, over-anxious to say many things rather than to say one thing so well that it will be understood and will stick in the memory. For that reason my many excerpts from him may be forgiven.

Thus far we have seen illustrations of various kinds—common experience, personal experience, fable, supposition, metaphor (all from Maitland). Our Lord's words furnish us with great variety, as we have seen. He frequently employed similes: "The kingdom of heaven is like . . .", or "To whom shall I liken this generation? It is like . . ." or "Every one therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man . . ." Some of His parables, however, are not introduced by similes, but stand simply as stories with a moral. Perfect in their application, they are still always interesting in themselves. Whilst, therefore,

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[8] Birrell, *Obiter Dicta* (2nd Series), p. 211: "Dr. S. R. Maitland, of the Lambeth library, whose volumes entitled 'The Dark Ages' and 'The Reformation' are to history what Milton's 'Lycidas' is said to be to poetry; if they do not interest you, your tastes are not historical."

the first intention of the preacher in illustrating should be clarification, he may still use anecdotes, figures, and the like, partly for the interest they awaken, the beauty they confer on discourse, the aid they furnish to memory.

In all this, of course, there are dangers to be avoided. A discourse should not be overloaded with anecdote or simile or metaphor or personal experience. The time allowed for the delivery of God's truth is very limited at best, and the best use must be made of that time. Illustration may not reasonably be employed merely for its own sake—its beauty, its interest in general, its information conveyed, its learning displayed. And never, assuredly, for the vanity of popularity thus attained. On the other hand, the best use of a limited time may not be to crowd as many lessons within its narrow plot of ground as may be squeezed into it by mathematical precision of premise, argumentation, conclusion. *Non multa sed multum.* "Ah! how many phrases! Ah! how many ideas! A single phrase well thought out is worth a whole thousand of these superfluous ideas; a single idea, well developed, is worth a whole thousand of these redundant phrases."[9] And, it may be inferred, a single lesson well inculcated through

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[9] Roux, *Meditations of a Parish Priest* (tr. Hapgood), p. 51.

adequate illustration is worth a whole thousand of arid, cramped, lifeless demonstrations of duty.

Besides wasting valuable time, an overabundance of illustration may serve rather to cloud than to clarify an argument. We cannot see the wood for the trees. The current of thought is diverted into too many channels, and we may be led to concentrate our thoughts on the similies and metaphors rather than on the knotty point they were meant to cut into: "The story of the Spanish painter of the Lord's supper illustrates the tendency of this error:

> It was his object to throw all the sublimity of his art into the figure and countenance of the Saviour; but on the table, in the foreground of the picture, he painted some chaste cups, so exceedingly beautiful and so skilfully painted that the attention of all who called to see the picture was at once attracted to the cups, and every one was loud in their praise. The painter observing this, saw that he had failed in his design of directing attention to the principal object in the picture, and exclaiming, "I have made a mistake, for these cups divert the eyes of the spectator from the Master," he immediately seized his brush and dashed them from the canvas.

"So we should dash from our sermons every illustration and ornament which would divert attention from the main design rather than become auxiliary to it."[10]

[10] Kidder, *A Treatise on Homiletics* (rev. ed.), p. 252.

There is such a thing as monotony of illustration. Some preachers are prone to multiply anecdotes; others, to indulge in personal reminiscences; still others, to revel in highly wrought pieces of imagery, or repeated cases of supposition, or picture-painting in words. Some speakers show the narrow range of their thoughts or interests by confining illustrations to one class of subject, such as agriculture, trade, mechanical arts, literature, history, science. Variety is the spice of sermonizing as well as of life. The preacher should feel that, being a man, everything of human interest is his natural province.

One special danger is to be avoided in any of these lines—namely, an illustration that itself needs illustration, or needs too prolix a statement of facts that are necessarily informative in character if the illustration itself is to be understood. Such are apt to be those illustrations, otherwise admirable and interesting, which are based on facts or theories of natural science. Many wonderful things in science are now of common knowledge, of course—the electricity which, in trolley-cars, appears now as motive-power, again as light, again as heat; aeroplanes and submarines; wireless telegraphy; telephones and their developing wonders, and the like. But many are abstruse enough; and even natural history, interesting though it be of itself, and

furnishing excellent possibilities here, is to be used with care for a similar reason.

In order to meet the illustrative needs of preachers, fairly innumerable volumes have been compiled. What should our attitude be to such helps offered to our infirmity—an infirmity due, perhaps, to limitations of leisure because of our busy ministry; or perhaps due to limitations of natural endowment—and not to our lack of manly energy?

One class of such volumes is that of anthologies of suitable prose or verse. Dr. John Watson [11] protests humorously and vigorously against such books:

> Certain preachers enrich their sermons with quotations, and a stately line has often fitly crowned an argument. But this habit calls for delicacy and reticence. When the sentence of some loved writer occurs to one as he is thinking out his discourse, and he uses it as the expression of his own mind, then it becomes a part of the pattern, and is more than justified. When he stops at intervals, and goes in search of such passages, the quotation is then foreign to his thinking, it is a tag of embroidery stitched on the garment. It is said that there are ingenious books which contain extracts—very familiar, as a rule—on every religious subject, so that the minister, having finished his sermon of Faith or Hope, has only to take down this pepper-castor and flavor his somewhat bare sentences with literature. If this ignominious tale be founded on fact, and be not a scandal of the

[11] Watson, *The Cure of Souls*, pp. 49-51.

enemy, then the Protestant Church ought also to have an Index Expurgatorius, and its central authorities insert therein books which it is inexpedient for ministers to possess. In this class should be included "The Garland of Quotations" and "The Reservoir of Illustrations," and it might be well if the chief of this important department should also give notice at fixed times that such and such anecdotes, having been worn threadbare, are now withdrawn from circulation. The cost of this office would be cheerfully defrayed by the laity.

The last part of this excerpt makes the criticism apply to all books compiled for illustrative ends. Is the criticism wholly justifiable? Beecher was not at one mind with Watson in this matter. At the close of his lecture on Rhetorical Illustrations,[12] the first question asked of him was:

Q. Do you think the use of these encyclopedias of illustration is honest?

B. Why not?

Q. Because one ought to make his illustrations himself, I should say.

B. That is purely a question with yourself. If a man says he would rather take the pains and time to work out his illustrations himself, he has a perfect right to do so. It is just the same question that comes up in everything else. "Do you think a man ought to copy pictures, or to study from nature?" One school will tell you one thing, and another school another thing. It is simply a matter of preference. I should not borrow my illustrations a great while

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[12] Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching*, p. 176.

if I could help it; but if you find that you accomplish your designs in preaching, and at the same time improve yourself by practising in that way, it is allowable.

The answer appears to be sane enough.[13] Not all preachers are gifted with powers of observation, and the art is not very easily acquired. Not all are trained sufficiently in the art of vivid and dramatic condensation and expression of thought to render quite superfluous the assistance offered by better gifted minds and better trained pens. Not all have leisure to read extensively, to digest thoroughly what they read, to make it part of their own mental structure through meditation and correlation. Besides, what real difference is there between reading in a "Life" or "Memoir" of some great man, an incident or anecdote of illustrative value, and coming upon that very incident, duly categorized with others of its ilk, in a collection of anecdotes? And even anthologies of mere quotations—why should they not be of service

[13] Taylor, *The Ministry of the Word*, p. 193, declares the method he pursued in acquiring the art of illustration, and continues: "It might have been easy to have saved myself all this trouble, if I had been content to have appropriated ready-made the analogies employed by those eminent preachers to whom I have referred, or to have availed myself of those helps to laziness which have been published in the shape of Cyclopædias of Religious Anecdotes and Illustrations. But not to speak of the dishonesty of such a proceeding. . . ." Beecher's querist may have found the basis of his question in this rigid view of literary honesty.

if compiled by skilled editors? These volumes, too, contain, or ought to contain, "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." Occasionally a Lowell arises to challenge the excellent expression of some common thought:

> Though old the thought, and oft expressed,
> 'T is his at last who says it best:
> I'll try my fortune with the rest,

But for most of us it may be wise to imitate the humility of a modern writer who declared that, when an original thought came to his mind, he always turned to the old Greek dramatists to learn how best to express it. Let us suppose, however, that our preacher has not at hand that ancient dramatic art—may he not be equally favored by finding the expression he is seeking, duly categorized under Faith or Hope, in a homiletic thesaurus of illustrations? Books of illustrative material—similies, metaphors, allegories or parables, fables, stories, experiences, portrait galleries of saints and heroes of to-day or of yesterday, natural phenomena, natural history or science, literature or art or history or trades or professions or the mechanical arts —why, indeed, may he not, if they really help him to clarity of demonstration or to the stimulation of interest, use them with a quiet conscience?

XI

SERMON ANECDOTAGE

HOMILETIC dotage and anecdotage appear to be synonymous in the mind of Professor Mahaffy. To anecdotage he ascribes[1] partly the decay—or dotage—of modern preaching. An excessive love of variety leads, he thinks, to what he styles "the vulgar habit of introducing anecdotes in the pulpit—anecdotes, which are not only foolish and beside the point, but often practically untrue, inasmuch as the preacher always explains the facts, and the explanation may be palpably invented. Anecdotage in the pulpit gratifies only the most ignorant and vulgar of hearers, and from vulgar I mean to exclude all those, of however low degree, who come to hear seriously for the sake of spiritual benefit."

The distinguished scholar doubtless spoke from experience—an experience perhaps similar to that recorded in her diary by a German lady and quoted[2] thence by Spurgeon:

[1] Mahaffy, *The Decay of Modern Preaching*, p. 125.
[2] Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Eng. ed.), p. 147.

There is a mission station here, and young men come down to preach to us. I do not wish to find fault with these young gentlemen, but they tell us a great many very pretty little stories, and I do not think there is much else in what they say. Also, I have heard some of their little stories before; therefore they do not so much interest me as they would do if they would tell us some good doctrine out of the Scriptures.

Commenting [3] on this, Taylor adds: "Repeatedly, however, have I heard incidents introduced into discourses which, though interesting enough in themselves, had no bearing, either immediate or remote, on the subject which the preacher was professing to discuss. They simply filled up time, and by diverting the attention from the topic which ought to have been uppermost, they did more harm than good. Remember, therefore, that as it is essential to a good style that one should have something to say, and should say that well; so it is no less essential to the proper use of illustration that one should have something to illustrate, and should use his simile in such a manner as to illustrate that well." He thus sets up a good principle, and thereupon proceeds himself to give an excellent anecdote illustrating the principle. Spending some days in "the quiet little English town of Lutterworth," he saw in the

[3] Taylor, *The Ministry of the Word*, p. 184.

shop of a cabinet-maker a magnificent bookcase which had just been finished:

I was at once attracted by it, and began to examine it minutely. Then I ventured rashly to criticise it, and even suggested something which I thought would be an improvement. But the intelligent workman said, "I could not do that, sir, for it would be contrary to one great rule in art." "What rule?" I asked. "This rule," replied he, "that we must never construct ornament, but only ornament construction." It was quaintly spoken, but it was to me a word in season. I saw in a moment that this principle held as truly in the architecture of a sermon as in that of a cathedral—in the construction of a discourse as in that of a book-case; and often since, when I have caught myself making ornament for its own sake, I have destroyed what I had written, and I have done so simply from the recollection of that artisan's reproof. There is a whole "philosophy of rhetoric" in his words. Whenever, therefore, you are tempted to let illustration become the principal thing, or to forget the great object of your discourse, in your effort to work in the drapery of some beautiful image, let this good rule come back upon you with its wholesome counsel. See that you have construction to ornament before you allow ornament to make its appearance.

What is an anecdote? Broadus[4] has a good paragraph, part of which may be quoted here:

Anecdotes, literally things unpublished, originally denoted interesting matters, chiefly historical and

[4] Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (37th ed.), p. 238.

biographical incidents, gathered from unpublished manuscripts of ancient authors, and thrown into a miscellaneous collection. Though now more widely used, the term is still most properly applied to stories of what one has himself observed, or has drawn from oral sources. Understood, however, in the wider sense, so as to include published narratives of detached incidents, anecdotes are a valuable means of illustration, which some preachers employ excessively or in bad taste, but which others ought to employ much more largely than they do. He who feels that his style would be degraded by introducing an anecdote, may profitably inquire whether his style be not too stilted, or, at any rate, too monotonous in its sustained elevation, for popular discourse.

For our present purposes, let us consider anecdotes as embracing "stories" of all kinds —allegories, parables, apologues, narratives historical or biographical, published or unpublished, personal experiences, and even "pipe-dreams." Let these have point and applicability; a subtle dash of humor at times, it may be; the power of arresting and sustaining interested attention; truth of fact or at least of nature; honesty in declaring themselves as fact or fancy, as the case may be; artistic restraint, so that they be not luxuriant in detail or verbose in diction—let them be largely of this type, and they serve well a preacher's purpose to instruct, to please, to move his hearers.

First of all, they can help to make his meaning clear, or to render his argument more forcible.

He might say, prosily enough, that the sin of pride is able to change the fleshly heart of man into rigid marble, so that it will neither seek nor grant pardon. But the French pulpit orator chose a more dramatic, more forcible, more interesting method of saying this when he pictured Satan as complaining to God that He had condemned that arch-rebel to endless torments for one sin, but had pardoned humans many sins. "And hast thou even once asked for pardon?" was the Divine reply. No, for Satan's pride would not bend thus far to His Creator and King.

The thought of the dramatic colloquy was doubtless suggested by Satan's complaint in the Book of Job. Patience, not pride, is the theme there, but the vivid lesson is introduced by the sublime colloquy between Satan and God.[5]

Second, they can awaken interest. Stories are pleasing not alone to boys and girls, but as well to children of a larger growth. One can see his auditory brighten when, in the midst of an argumentation or proof or continuous statement, a "story"—be it a personal experience or a narrative or an oriental apologue—is introduced. And the interest thus aroused is sustained partly by curiosity to learn first of all

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[5] 1:6-12; 2:1-6.

the denouement of the story and then its *raison d'être* in the sermon. I venture to think that writers on homiletics are apt to overstate the case when they insist that "examples" must never be used unless they truly illustrate some point in the sermon. A sermon is not less valuable if it be artistically constructed. But literary art has its own justified methods of variety. That we may not sup full of blood in *Macbeth,* Shakespeare introduces points of rest —the calm pastoral dialogue before Duncan's castle, the prattling of Lady Macduff's boy, the somnolent mutterings of the unduly awakened porter. The preacher, in like manner, may and at certain times should allow the fatigued attention of his listeners to rest quietly on an interesting "story." In such a case, the "example" or anecdote is not rehearsed purely for its own sake, but rather for the sake of the hearers, who may have supped too full of logical demonstration.

I recall a certain retreat during my seminary days in which the retreat-master kept constantly a shrewd eye upon us boys, and when the heat of a September afternoon or the closeness of the chapel air caused us to nod at times, would arouse new interest by some startling anecdote which perhaps illustrated nothing beyond his own sane pedagogy.

How should anecdotes be introduced, with preface or *ex abrupto*? By the latter method, we are told:[6]

> The *preface* should usually be—wanting; and, where one is needed, as informal as possible. Dr. Joseph Parker declares that as soon as he hears a preacher say, "My beloved brethren, let us illustrate this by one of the most beautiful and affecting anecdotes which it was ever my privilege to hear," he makes up his mind "to endure a dreary recital of very painful nonsense." This is hardly a caricature; and this I know is not: "I am indebted for the following illustration to a work entitled 'The Tongue of Fire, or, The True Power of Christianity' by the Rev. William Arthur." Nor is this: "I will here relate an incident that I have read, not only because it is very affecting in itself, but because it will illustrate the subject under discussion." No "painful nonsense" followed either of these prefaces, but each had a decidedly leaden effect on "the following illustration."

The parable—anecdotal in form—can be made to point a moral at least equally well. It can be made more interesting, because it permits of more pertinent detail, more word-painting, and more apparent actuality. It does not come to us ready-made, however, for it demands an art that can hardly be taught and a degree of laboriousness in construction that supposes much

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[6] Kern, *The Ministry to the Congregation*, p. 229.

zeal on the part of the preacher. Warnings against lengthiness, minuteness, verbosity, properly urged against the ordinary anecdote, lose much of their force here. The whole sermon may consist of a well-wrought parable; for sometimes its application hardly needs a formal statement; its appeal to the intellect and the will may subtly permeate it from beginning to end.

One such parable, comprising two subdivisions (like that of the Pharisee and the Publican), I heard some years since at a priests' retreat. The contrast painted was between the zealous priest and the worldly or indifferent priest. The two pictures were painted in great detail and formed the whole sermon or conference or meditation—whatever name may technically apply to the address. From birth to death their contrasting careers were minutely detailed. Both had the same catechism, the same sacraments, the same academic lives, the same seminary training. After ordination, both had curacies and finally pastorates—*e pòi . . .* both lay on the appointed deathbeds. The incidents and circumstances thus employed were typical and common, and for that reason appealed to us with lifelike vividness. "True to life"—not exaggerated sensationally, not startling in substance or expression, the parables

spoke their own moral unmistakably. Verisimilitude, interest, poignant application (say rather, applicability—for there was no formal "application") were the three graces linked hand in hand.

One writer says:[7]

I have found in the course of my own ministry that parabolical representations of truth have excited a most healthful and profitable interest. All men have somewhat of the dramatic element in them; hence they watch with eagerness the development and consummation of a plot, or a plan, if you like that word better in this connection. *How will it end?* is the anxious inquiry. If you keep your eyes open, you will see the working of this dramatic element in many of the common concerns of daily life. Dispute with a cabman about his fare, and the baker, the milkman, and the lamplighter will soon gather round you to see how the controversy will end; offer to put a hundred pieces of curiously-shaped wood together, so as to make a complete figure of them, and all the children in the house will give up their lessons, and press upon you to see how the mystery is solved; tell a child that it is his duty to be honest, and he will infallibly pronounce you to be a bore; but give him a hint that you can tell him a wonderful story about the hair-breadth escapes of a thief, and he will tease you to relate the tale, and will perhaps beg you to go over parts of it again and again. What of it —and especially what of it in relation to the ministry? We must seek the readiest entrance to the human mind, and through that entrance must convey

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[7] Parker, *Ad Clerum*, pp. 244-245.

Christian instruction. I know that you will ask, whether this, that, or the other is legitimate, or is in keeping with the dignity of the pulpit. Enough for me to know that Jesus Christ dramatized truth: all the elements of a most exciting romance are to be found in the parable of the prodigal son; why therefore should we hesitate to follow, with such power as God may give us, the example of the Master? Everywhere there is keen interest in life, character, destiny; little children feel it, and old men are not superior to it. This interest has undoubtedly been debased by vicious novels and corrupt dramas, but this is no argument whatever against novels and dramas that are good. You can convey just as much solid truth through the medium of a drama as through the medium of an exposition or exhortation—you carry the attention of your hearers with you from beginning to end, and are likely to give the subject an abiding-place in their recollection. Of course, if you construct a clumsy or inconsistent parable, you must bear the mockery which you deserve. I am speaking of parables that recommend themselves by a basis of strong common sense and a fair share of fancy and eloquence; such parables, delivered with a simplicity which is at the farthest possible distance from theatrical affectation, will never fail to secure the best results. . . . If you have not the power, don't waste your time in parable-grinding. A poor sermon is bad enough, but a poor parable is intolerable. A parable that is cumbrous, mechanical, labored, will offend and weary the unhappy victims on whose patience it is inflicted. . . . There must be no display of mere cleverness. . . . Each parable must have its own distinct lesson . . . the doctrine must be clear, the lesson must be emphatic.

Homiletic writers caution the preacher

against multiplication of illustrations.[8] They are windows through which the light of truth may enter in upon some darkened chamber of the mind. That is their purpose, and it is only by accident that they add beauty or ornamentation to the edifice of thought. But "stories" in any form, parable or anecdote or what not, take up time that should be given to instruction, argumentation, exhortation. Generally, they should be few and brief. "Generally"—but here the common sense and good taste of the preacher must preside over the sermonizing.

There may, however, be different phases of the same truth that are to be vividly brought home to the hearer. The 15th chapter of St. Luke is wholly given over to the parables of the lost sheep, the lost groat, the prodigal son —three parables illustrating the same general truth, but severally calling attention to various phases of that truth. Or the same phase must

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[8] Phelps, *The Theory of Preaching*, p. 440: "The difficulties of composition must have already disclosed to you the temptation which a preacher experiences to illustrate for other purposes than to meet the necessities of the thing in hand. . . . We are tempted to fill in with anecdote for the sake of the story, not because the thing in hand demands the anecdote. . . . Illustrative stories have so multiplied in number, that now the larger portion of the time spent in listening to him [a certain popular lecturer] is devoted to laughter at his jocular coruscations. His hearers find that their digestion improves more than their culture. All these forms of illustrative digression are claptrap. . . . Such illustrations do not advance the subject. They do not carry it: it carries them."

be emphasized again and again, by illustrations which throw cumulative light upon some distasteful truth, such, for instance, as the necessity for pardon of injuries. Anger is almost as deep-seated and enduring as love itself. It is very difficult to get men to forgive. A preacher who should use Our Lord's parable of the debtor as a text and draw out its meaning fully, might wish properly to add the weight of the petition in the *Our Father* and use Portia's plea based thereon, cite Gerald Griffin's poem on the Orangeman who sheltered the slayer of his son, and the quite similar oriental apologue of Lowell's entitled *Yussouf,* perhaps rehearse other appropriate illustrations, such as the breviary narrative of St. John Gualbert. These would serve to show the true dignity attained by the man who conquers himself in such a tremendous moral struggle. Their effect would be cumulative, tending to wear down pride and its support of anger, even as the constant dropping of water at length wears away a very stone.

"In studying history, beware of trusting to anecdotes." The warning was given by an esteemed professor of ecclesiastical history under whom it was my pleasure to work. Whether the caution was expressed originally by him, I do not know. But writers on homiletics warn

us to relate only well-authenticated incidents, because the pulpit must be the throne of truth. The people so regard it even in matters of trivial detail, and may easily be scandalized—the *scandalum pusillorum,* doubtless—by narratives whose veraciousness they may suspect because of vagueness as to time, place, and other circumstances. And so, as a vaguely rumored incident passes from mouth to mouth, it is apt to be ornamented by precise, but unfortunately varying, details intended, perhaps, to "give verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing tale," as the prime minister in the *Mikado* hath it. The temptation is to add such details. They are curiously absent from the anecdote quoted by Davies [9] as from Archdeacon Hare. It is the famous *"e pòi"* story put into English dress:

> A professor of great reputation for wisdom and piety was once accosted by a student just entering the University of which he was a professor. "My parents have just given me leave to study the law, which is the thing I have been wishing for all my life, and I have now come to this University on account of its great fame, and mean to spare no pains in mastering the subject." While thus he was running on, the professor interrupted him. "Well, and when you have got through your course of studies —what then?" "Then I shall take my doctor's de-

[9] Davies, *Papers on Preaching* (3rd ed.), p. 123.

gree." "And then?" answered the doctor. "And then (continued the youth) I shall have a number of difficult cases to manage, which will increase my fame, and I shall gain a great reputation." "And then?" repeated the holy man. "Why, then there cannot be a question I shall be promoted to some high office or another; besides, I shall make money and grow rich." "And then?" the holy man interposed. "And then," replied the youth, "I shall live in honor and dignity, and be able to look forward to a happy old age." "And then?" was again asked. "And then, and then (said the youth), I shall die." Here the holy man lifted up his voice and again inquired—"And then?" The young man could answer no more, but went away sorrowful.

The various replies of the youth are conceived in so stilted a fashion, and the progress toward the catastrophe is so regularly placed, that a hearer with a temperament not naturally suspicious might find difficulty in crediting the narrative. He would prefer, with natural critical acumen, to consider it a parable rather than an anecdote, and would marvel if details of names and of time and place were affixed to add the desired touch of verisimilitude. Such, at least, is my opinion, which would also cover the following anecdote quoted by Father Feeney[10]

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[10] Feeney, *Manual of Sacred Rhetoric*, p. 225. Elsewhere (p. 220) he observes appositely: "No example based on questionable authority should be used. Nothing but truth, even in the smallest details, should ever be heard from our pulpits. We have no excuse for deviating from this rule. The Bible

as "a fair specimen of an anecdote well adapted for pulpit use; but" (he adds) "it would be more telling if authenticated by details of time, place, and witnesses":

On the deck of a foundering vessel stood a negro slave. The last man left on board, he was about to step into the life-boat. She was laden to the gunwale, to the water's edge. Bearing in his arms what seemed a heavy bundle, the boat's crew, who with difficulty kept her afloat in the roaring sea, refused to receive him. If he come it must be unencumbered and alone, on that they insisted. He must either leave that bundle and leap in, *or throw it in and stay to perish.* Pressing it to his bosom, he opened its folds; and there, warmly wrapped, lay two little children, whom their father had committed to his care. He kissed them, and bade the sailors carry his affectionate farewell to his master, telling him how faithfully he had fulfilled his charge. Then lowering the children into the boat, which pushed off, the dark man stood alone on the deck, to go down with the sinking ship, a noble example of bravery,

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and authentic history, ecclesiastical and civil, together with the carefully written lives of great and holy men, supply us with abundant sources of examples without going to look for others in the shadow-land of popular tradition and legend. Neither are we allowed to exaggerate details for the purpose of effect. Facts seldom occur in real life with the artistic roundness and finish that fiction gives them. Some popular non-Catholic preachers seem not to be aware of this truth, and they give anecdotes from personal experience, so telling and apposite, and so classical in their observance of the unities, that to claim belief in them as actual occurrences is an insult to common sense, a profanity of truth, an outrage on the Gospel. Such preachers acquire a short-lived popularity; but they have no influence on Christian faith and conduct."

and true fidelity, and the "love that seeketh not its own."

I have italicized one detail that obviously tends greatly to discredit the desired authenticity of the tale. What was in the wrapped-up bundle could not, of course, have been surmised by the sailors, and one wonders why they should have given such alternatives to the negro, either to save the bundle (presumably carrying his own few possessions) and to lose his own life (in which case the safety of the bundle could not interest him), or to save his own life at the cost of losing his bundle. But, indeed, the point needs not such laboring. One would be justified in harboring a suspicion that the tale was devised for the Scriptural moral which forms its climax.

Whilst a sermon may consist wholly of an ingenious and appropriate parable, it should not begin with an anecdote, we are told, for the reason, presumably, that anecdotes, like other illustrations, are meant to throw light upon some statement or argument already made. The same thing would be true of any "story," such as a short parable or apologue. Clearly, however, there may be exceptions to this rule. St. Paul began his wonderful sermon at Athens by narrating a personal experience. His exordium was anecdotal: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive

that in all things you are too superstitious. For passing by, and seeing your idols, I found an altar also, on which was written: *To the unknown God.* What therefore you worship without knowing it, that I preach to you: God, who made the world . . . " The little incident, become now an anecdote, leads to the theme of the sermon, *The Unknown God.*

Similarly, Nathan is sent by God to convert David to penance, and begins his brief preachment with a parable which, until it was explicated by Nathan in the words "Thou art the man," must have seemed to David the narration of an actual occurrence. There is no exordium save the story itself: "There were two men in one city, the one rich, and the other poor," etc. Also parabolic in form was the appeal made by the wise woman of Thecua (2 Kings 14:1-20), which directly begins with her "story." Some of Our Lord's parables began as declared similitudes ("The kingdom of heaven is like . . . "), but others had no such exordium (e.g. the lost sheep, the lost groat, the prodigal son, the Good Samaritan), the application of the story being made at its conclusion.

Especially may a personal experience, introduced without any trace of vanity or ostentation, prelude the sermon. Thus I once heard the famous Dominican, Father McKenna, pre-

lude a sermon on charity by a simple but, in his hands, a very moving personal experience with a poor old woman who had lost her husband by death.

The introductory anecdote may well, however, be briefly prefaced. Hrabanus Maurus, preaching against certain superstitious observances anent an eclipse of the moon, opens one [11] of his homilies as follows:

It is a great joy to me, beloved brethren, that I see you love the name of Christians, frequent the churches, seek the Baptism of Christ for your sons and daughters, and study the worship of the true God; but it grieves me exceedingly that I see many of you implicated in certain follies, going astray, and mixing among the truths of the Christian religion certain false things, which in no wise should be done. For it is written, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

When, some days since, I was sitting quietly at home, and thinking how I might assist your progress in the Lord, suddenly, about evening, and at nightfall, there was such a vociferation of the people, that the irreligious sound penetrated even to heaven. I asked what the noise meant. They told me that there was an eclipse of the moon, and that your shouts and endeavors were intended to assist it in its distress. I laughed, and wondered at your folly that, like devoted Christians, you were offering your assistance to God; as if, forsooth, He were weak and helpless un-

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[11] Neale, *Mediæval Preachers and Mediæval Preaching*, pp. 36-37, from whom I take the illustration, styles the opening "curious."

less He were assisted by your cries, and could not defend the lights which He Himself created. Next morning I inquired of those who came to visit me, if they had ever seen anything similar. They replied that they had not only known the like, but worse things in the places where they lived. One said that he had heard the blowing of horns, as if encouraging to the battle; another, the grunting of pigs; some told me that they had seen men casting javelins and arrows against the moon; that others scattered flakes of fire toward the sky, and affirmed that some terrible monster was destroying that orb, and but for this help would entirely devour it; that some, in order to satisfy the illusion of the demons, cut down their hedges and broke all the vessels they had in their houses, as if that would assist the moon in her eclipse. What madness is this, brethren! etc.

Clearly, this "personal experience" narrated by the preacher was a more vivid, dramatic and therefore interesting method than such an arid statement as might have taken its place, as for instance: "One of your follies which mix pagan customs with the Christianity you profess, is your strange and ludicrous belief that you can assist the moon in her period of eclipse by great shoutings . . . "

One distinction between fable and parable is that the former personifies the animal, or vegetable, or mineral creation, while the latter bases itself on the common life of human beings. May fables be appropriately introduced into the Christian pulpit?

Instances occur in the Bible. Joatham's fable [12] is called a parable, but only in a wide sense: "The trees went to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign thou over us.' And it answered, 'Can I leave my fatness, which both gods and men make use of, to come to be promoted among the trees?' And the trees said to the fig-tree, 'Come thou and reign over us.' And it answered them," etc. Joatham makes a stirring application of his fable. However, he was not preaching, in the proper sense of the word, but was addressing the men of Sichem from the top of mount Garizim. There was around him no special sanctity of temple or church. A similar distinction lies against the fable of the thistle of Libanus and the cedar, which Joas constructed [13] for the benefit of Amasias.

Broadus favors [14] their use: "Fables are so often alluded to in common conversation that we scarcely notice it, and the occasions are very numerous in which they might be usefully employed in preaching. An author of distinction, and of wide attainments and experience of life, remarked some years ago, that, in his judgment, next to the Bible and Shakespeare, the

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[12] Judges 9:7-15.
[13] 4 Kings 14:9, 10.
[14] Broadus, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

most instructive book in the world was Æsop's Fables." This judgment is in accord with that of James, editor of the Fables, that they "were not a child's plaything, but a nation's primer."

XII

PREPARING TO PREACH

WHETHER the sermon is to be written out in full or merely sketched after long meditation, some kind of plan is necessary. "Its object is to register the distribution of matter, to fix the order of the composition, and so secure for it a vertebrate and organic unity. It is to stand before the mind and eye of the writer as a reminder of his purpose, and a warning against wavering and aimless digression from it." Thus Father O'Dowd,[1] who counsels preachers to adopt the plan which they find most suitable: "Some will sketch out a few short indications of divisions and subdivisions, others will favor a full synopsis."

Mgr. Meyenberg[2] goes more into detail. He admits that "the different individuality of preachers should be granted its own rights in the elaboration; in a certain sense each one creates his own method of preparation. Yet, in spite of this, a general valuable course of prepa-

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1 *Preaching* (1919), pp. 82, 83.
2 *Homiletic and Catechetic Studies* (1919), p. 756.

ration may be planned in great outlines"—and he sets forth the following points:

(*a*) According to the admonition of St. Augustine, God's help should be invoked.

(*b*) Determine the subject of the sermon; define clearly whether it should be treated more didascally than paregoretically. Then write down the subject and the special aim in a clear conception, but be sure to conceive the aim very securely and sharply and enlist in the service of the same all your thinking and labor.

(*c*) Seek the thoughts, write them down, for instance, numerically: they are, as it were, the raw material in the hands of the preacher: *Omnis scriba doctus in regno cœlorum similis est patrifamilias, qui profert de thesauro suo nova et vetera* (Matt. 13:52).

The suggestion to write the thoughts *numerically* is, I think, a striking departure from the usual methods of composition. He continues:

(*d*) Examine the material, classify it, eliminate the superfluous or surplus, determine the parts, then elaborate the sketch in detail, and thus create gradually the final disposition. Often the defects of the sketch become more manifest in the execution. Therefore, the preacher need not be over-anxious during the elaboration in regard to each detail of the selected sketch; it should be the staff and support, but not the belt.

(*e*) Write the sermon. The best teacher of homiletic exposition is the pen. . . .

This method fairly embodies the suggestions

of St. Francis Borgia and of St. Alphonsus Liguori in their treatises on preaching. The former thinks of the preacher as having first of all read much and then reflected on the matter of his reading. Boyd-Carpenter thinks that reflection should precede and govern the direction of our reading, for that reflection will show us our needs. Howbeit, the Saint would then have all the matter thus collected put into an orderly arrangement, since a mob of crude thoughts will try both the patience of the hearers and the memory of the preacher. Also:

> Either the hearer will not understand what is said, or he will not remember it; and in consequence of want of arrangement of the matter the speaker will neither produce conviction nor move the will. In the creation of the universe and the construction of buildings order is manifest. That by means of preaching the Holy Ghost may dwell in the hearts of the faithful, God (as we picture it to ourselves) created matter devoid of form, and next light and the other things which beautify and adorn matter, until at last He came to the creation of man, and placed everything in its proper place. It is thus in my opinion the preacher ought to act. First let him choose a text, and draw from it the subject and the matter of the doctrine he desires to inculcate; next let him seek out what the holy Fathers have taught concerning it, and, after reflecting on the gospel, let him arrange his matter in good order, and follow out a plan; let him put everything in its proper place so as to satisfy the intellect; moreover, let him have in readiness many commonplaces, a supply of texts, authorities, proofs

from reason, metaphors, tropes, figures, examples from Sacred Scripture, facts from history and similes.

Boyle, the Saint's translator, hereupon notes that St. Alphonsus gives similar advice:

> Having selected a subject, write down on a sheet of paper the sentiments, motives, similitudes and examples which you have found in your reading. Then read over the whole, and see to how many points the sermon may be reduced. Next write on a separate sheet the points you have discovered, putting a heading on each. Then note again the matters that bear on each point, and mark them with a number. [Perhaps this thought will explain Mgr. Meyenberg's suggestion to write down the thoughts numerically.] When you perceive that you possess sufficient matter, then arrange in order the authorities, reasons and moral reflections, giving each its own place. Then commence to develop the discourse.—St. Alphonsus, *Instructions for Missions,* ch. vii, sec. i, On Preaching.

The framework or plan of the sermon is thus dependent upon the matter which has been obtained by varied reading. The plan is not an analysis of the text or a growth from it as from a seed that gradually sprouts, grows, bears flower and fruit by an organic process. Rather is it an appropriate peg upon which to hang a logical discourse on the subject suggested by the text.

Mgr. Meyenberg also seems to intimate that the sketch of the sermon should follow rather than precede the numerical writing down of the

thoughts. These are to be grouped, perhaps by the logical faculty operative in a trained mind such as that of a young preacher, in an orderly way, and thus finally the sketch is arrived at. He does not suggest any mechanical frame for a sketch.

Mgr. Benson[3] is more specific. "I have come," says Fr. O'Dowd, "into possession of a lithographed copy of some hints for preaching in which Mgr. Benson briefly describes his own method, which is almost the direct opposite of the one for which I have been pleading. It may be found of use to those who are naturally of his own turn of mind; and some of his sug-

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[3] In *Hugh: Memoirs of a Brother*, A. C. Benson records of Mgr. Benson in his early Anglican days some interesting details concerning his attempts at extempore preaching (p. 94), and also gives (p. 109) the following pertinent reference to his system of preparing sermons: "I have in my possession hundreds of his skeleton notes. They consist of the main points of his argument, written out clearly and underlined, with a certain amount of the texture indicated, sentence-summaries, epigrammatic statements, dicta, emphatic conclusions. He attained his remarkable facility by persistent, continuous and patient toil; and a glance at his notebooks and fly-leaves would be the best of lessons for anyone who was tempted to depend upon fluid and easy volubility. He used to say that, after long practice, a sermon would fall into shape in a very few moments; and I remember his once taking a carefully written address of my own, summarizing and denuding it, and presenting me with a little skeleton of its essence, which he implored me to use; though I had not the courage to do so. He said, too, that he believed that he could teach anyone of ordinary brain-power and choice of language to preach extempore on these lines in six months, if only he would rigidly follow his method."

gestions may help them to improve or perfect the method which best suits themselves. I give them here as he wrote them, at the request of some theological students" (p. 107).

"How to Write a Sermon." By R. H. Benson.

"This is my own system."

I. Preach or lecture on *Subjects*, not texts; choose text last, and get the subject in mind so clear that it is possible to state it in one sentence.

E. g. "To Produce Contrition."
"To Explain such and such a Dogma."
"To rebut such and such a charge."

II. Construct sermon on organic system—head, body, tail—thus:

Introduction.
Points I—
II—
III—
IV—
Conclusion.

These "points" are the most important part, and should be done first (not less than two, or more than four)—they are the backbone. Each should be capable of statement in one sentence.

III. Construct notes deliberately and slowly, in form the eye can take in at a glance, with small, neat handwriting. Use underlining a good deal, and capital letters—and, at first, coloured inks or pencils. I believe that the memory works much more easily, visually, than intellectually or logically. Use other symbols or devices that catch the eye, and when chosen, use the same in all sermons, *e. g.* square brackets for illustrations.

What follows of Mgr. Benson's "own system" deals largely with his pet views on extempore preaching and does not particularly concern our present purpose. For instance, he would, like John Bright, write the last sentence out in full, or nearly, and stick to it when preaching, lest doubtless he should find "no end, in wandering mazes lost," like Milton's demons that sat on a hill retired and reasoned high of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate. For the remainder of his observations the reader is cordially recommended to consult Fr. O'Dowd's work.

The suggestion for the body of the sermon (No. II above) is simplicity itself. He does not minutely divide and subdivide. That was the method of the older pulpit orators. In France it often resulted, as Cardinal Newman somewhere points out, in three distinct sermons being preached at one time and with one text. The mind of the ordinary layman is apt to be mystified by multiple subdivisions, as his patience is likely to be worn out by the length of time consumed in the process.

This stark simplicity seems to be far removed from the elaborate schemes so painstakingly noted and described by Father Moeslein in his volume on *The Mechanism of Discourses.*[4]

[4] Chicago, 1915.

Every discourse must begin somewhere, must end somewhere. It must have "a head, a body, a tail." But call its beginning or head an "exordium," its ending or tail a "peroration"; analyze what the exordium and the peroration should artistically accomplish and what relation both have to the body of the discourse; discuss how best to attain the end or aim of the discourse—and simplicity appears to have been overlaid with all the refinements of logic, rhetoric, psychology. The student of homiletics may feel discouraged as he looks at these "Parts of Mechanism" as given by Fr. Moeslein (p. 16):

I. Group: *Cardinal Factors:*

1. The Moral;
2. The Sentiment;
3. The Theme;
4. Balanced Personality.

II. Group: *Cardinal Operations*

1. The Moralization;
2. The Amplification;
3. The Argumentation;
4. Taste and Tact.

These are general factors in persuasive discourse. But the mystery grows but little less dark when the student looks at the more familiar parts of the structure of discourse:

III. Group: *The Exordium:*

1. The Text;
2. The Fundamental;
3. The Redition;
4. The Exitus;
5. The Invocation.

IV. Group: *Body of the Discourse:*

1. The Confirmation of the Theme by Argumentation;
2. The exemplification of the Moral by Moralization;
3. The picturing of what is apt to awaken the Sentiment by Amplification;
4. The explaining away (of) difficulties by Refutation.

V. Group: *The Peroration:*

1. The Epilogue, which is a summing-up of the dominant thoughts of the Argumentation of the entire discourse;
2. The Application, which is a reviewing of the salient points of the Moralization;
3. The Appeal, which is the last, and should be the most telling effort of the Amplification.

The Ven. Strambi's different grouping is next given. It has three groups: Exordium, Body, Peroration. The Exordium comprises:

1. The Text;
2. The Fundamental;
3. The Redition;

4. The Exitus;
5. The Theme;
6. The Explanation or Narration;
7. The Division;
8. The Invocation.

Bossuet's (occasional) Method is next given, differing somewhat from either of the above schemata. Fr. Moeslein's work deals "with only one of the main subjects discussed by works on rhetoric and oratory. This subject is the structure or mechanism of discourses. . . . In conducting courses of instruction for those whose calling made it necessary to be employed in much public speaking, the writer found their greater difficulty to be, not the getting suitable material in abundance, but in the handling what they had gathered. In conversations with public speakers who were not beginners in the profession, especially clergymen, he was made to realize more, that to the same cause is attributable the unnecessarily protracted labor of turning to account the great amount of knowledge, both professional and collateral, possessed by priests generally"—and so he writes his book to meet this need.

In his Preface [5] to *The Pulpit Orator,* Father Lambing is highly gratified at the clearness of the planning exhibited by all the many sermons

[5] 13th rev. ed., 1916.

in the six volumes of that extensive work: "The theme, the text, the exordium, the division, the proofs from Scripture, the extracts from the Fathers, the illustrations, and the peroration containing the practical conclusion, are so disposed as to be taken in at a glance." While all this is systematic, judicious, instructive, and solid, he is furthermore pleased greatly by the novel, ingenious and striking illustrations. A glance at any of the sermons will exemplify one regular method of planning for the Sunday discourse.

Works on homiletics and on oratorical composition in general are very loath to give one clear example of a plan. A plan "will vary with the ever varying circumstances of the speaker, his subject and his audience, and especially with the end intended, which must regulate all the details of his task," says Fr. Coppens,[6] who advises the pupil to analysis and synthesis of great orations in order to attain facility at planning for himself.

The Rev. M. Bautain advises[7] much meditation of a theme, acceptance and rejection of ideas, grouping of them in their relationships, and so on, around a *main idea*. "Sometimes," he says, "the idea thus conceived is developed

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[6] *The Art of Oratorical Composition*, p. 92.
[7] *The Art of Extempore Speaking*, pp. 178-198.

and formed rapidly, and then the plan of the discourse arranges itself on a sudden, and you throw it upon paper, warm with the fervor of the conception which has just taken place, as the metal in a state of fusion is formed into the mould and fills at a single turn all its lineaments. . . . But, in general, one must not be in a hurry to form the plan. . . . The moment you feel that your idea is mature, and that you are master of it in its center and in its radiations, its main or trunk lines, take the pen and throw upon paper what you see, what you conceive in your mind. . . . Nevertheless, beware of introducing style into the arrangement of your plan; it ought to be like an artist's draught, the sketch which, by a few lines unintelligible to everybody save him who has traced them, decides what is to enter into the composition of the picture, and what place each object shall occupy. Light and shadow, coloring and expression, will come later. . . . Make your plan at the first heat, if you be impelled to do so, and follow your inspiration to the end; after which leave things alone for a few days, or at least for several hours."

All of which is not getting us very far forward toward anything specific. But, as the rhetoricians observe, it is impossible to be specific, for plans will vary with occasions, moods, temperaments, aims, and main ideas.

Nevertheless, as Fr. Moeslein remarks, most beginners at sermonizing may have many ideas, much material, sufficient learning both professional and collateral, and yet may not understand what to do with the ideas, the material, the learning. Sam Weller was quite facile in oral composition, but he bit his penholder to pulp, grew hot and uncomfortable, and gazed earnestly at vacancy, when he tried to put his thoughts down on paper.

A definite, ready-made framework into which ideas, arguments, illustrations, appeals, and the rest of the oratorical paraphernalia may be fitted is a desideratum with some beginners. Hitchcock [8] comes to their assistance with something clear, definite, suggestive. It is at once a plan and a method, vivid, detailed, picturesque, easily remembered. He gives place, of course, to the inevitable Introduction and Conclusion. In addition to these, there is the Body of the discourse, to be treated in three grand divisions: the work of the Memory, of the Intelligence, of the Will. Each of these three grand divisions is subdivided into three parts —a highly symmetrical and therefore easily memorized scheme. Reduced to a graphic representation it would look like this:

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[8] *Sermon Composition* (1908).

I. Memory	1. Introduction. 2. Picture. 3. Detail. 4. Scope.
II. Intellect	5. Suggestion. 6. Refutation. 7. Proof.
III. Will	8. Glad Motive. 9. Sad Motive. 10. Grand Motive. 11. Conclusion.

Thus, a Picture is to be painted in words for the contemplation of the congregation (No. 2). Some special Detail thereof is to be pointed out, for development and meditation (No. 3). That detail will suggest something symbolized by it, or the Scope of it (No. 4). Thus far we have operations of the Memory. Now the Intellect begins to work. First, the scope suggests the theme of the sermon, or what is termed the Suggestion (really, the "Proposition," which the writer thought might rather be suggested than formally stated), and we have No. 5. The suggestion (or veiled proposition) is apt to raise up in the minds of the hearers certain objections which perhaps reside in the subconsciousness, and the Refutation (No. 6) attends to these objections. The theme is then proved by the ordinary argumentation (No. 7). Next an

appeal is made to the Will, and we have (Nos. 8, 9, 10) the glad, the sad, the grand motives for action.

To each of these eleven points a sheet of foolscap is assigned, the point being written at the top as a title. If a bold, clear hand is used, Hitchcock reckons that the sermon will take about twenty minutes to deliver. Concerning these points he says:

> Carefully avoid these words in the sermon, that your method may not become evident to anyone who has read of this scheme. Learn them in order, for they form the rational chain, on which the memory sustains the whole theme. The visual memory is also greatly helped, when each of the eleven sections is strictly confined to its page, and written in a plain, bold hand. . . . For longer efforts we make the same preparation, and introduce extempore passages. A long sermon, entirely committed to memory, can hardly fail to become monotonous.

He gives short chapters on each of the eleven points or "sections." As a mechanical device for helping the memory and for suggesting a train of thought or treatment, the scheme appears to be valuable.

Good advice is given by Father Feeney[9] on "how to begin." "Many young writers," he says, "cannot easily determine how to begin.

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[9] *Manual of Sacred Rhetoric*, pp. 332-336.

If they had once started, they think they would write fluently, but the difficulty with them is how to start. Let them imagine themselves in the pulpit at the point of their sermon with which they begin to write—say the proposition. What would they say? Some words will surely occur to them, and in all likelihood they are the best to begin with. Another plan of starting for such writers is to be indifferent about the first sentence or two and to write on with the intention of changing or correcting afterwards, if necessary. Their minds are thus relieved of the burden of reflecting on the propriety of every word they use, and they can give their undivided energy to the plain, unaffected expression of their thoughts and sentiments."

And again: "When you find it hard to make your exposition or enforcement of some truth or duty simple and interesting, imagine yourself trying to bring it home to the most ignorant, dull-witted member of your parish, as you sit face to face with him in your library. Write down every word you would say to him . . . "

Again, if the mind is very torpid and clouded, the "best way for rising above those clouds . . . is to read some book that will have a stimulating, inspiring effect on him—a book that will set him thinking, that will suggest to him noble, beautiful thoughts. Let him read a page or

two of such a book; and he must be very dull indeed if, after doing so, he will not find himself able if not impelled to begin to write. Everyone of any literary culture will know what books have the most stimulating effect on him; and he will do well to keep one or more of them by him."

XIII

"PRACTICAL COUNSEL" FOR PREACHERS

THE marks of quotation placed around the first half of the title of this chapter are not intended to suggest a questioning criticism. The quoted words are found in the introductory portion of Mr. Vaux's little volume on *Preaching: What to Preach and How to Preach,* published some forty years ago. There was complaint then, as now, of the inferior quality of the sermons preached:

> The complaints commonly made respecting the inferior quality of the sermons delivered from Church of England pulpits will be a sufficient justification for the appearance of this volume . . . no short and inexpensive treatise is extant in which the subject of Preaching is dealt with *practically*. . . . Whatever may be the value of the contents of this volume, they are, at least, the result of above thirty years' experience in country and London parishes; and the writer cannot help feeling that if he had had some book of the kind put into his hands when a deacon, it would have been the better both for himself and for his congregations. . . . Much as preaching is thought of and talked about at the present time, it is somewhat sur-

prising that so little help, in the way of *practical counsel* and advice, has been given through the Press to the younger clergy to assist them in qualifying themselves for this important branch of ministerial work.

The italics in this extract are mine. What and how to preach—this is a large subject. The author confines his treatment within 150 small pages, for he wishes to be "practical." I venture to say that he is practical and gives concrete advice.

With all the larger works on homiletics, he advises the use of commonplace books, note-taking, study of the Scriptures, the Fathers, nature, history, science, and the like; the cultivation of spiritual life and aims, purity of motive, and the rest. But he does not linger long on such topics, properly taking for granted that such interests belong to any just preparation for the ministry, and do not specifically fall within the limited field of homiletics. He is "practical" in his specific mention of certain useful and available works on Scripture, the Fathers, and the ascetical writers.

In a previous chapter much was quoted from recent Catholic writers on preaching. The attempt was made to assemble in one place various observations that seemed to give concrete counsel respecting the preparation of sermons.

My present purpose is to quote similar advice from non-Catholic sources. We shall find this advice rather more detailed and specific, possibly for the reason that our separated brethren find their principal work of a homiletic character.

For instance, Mr. Vaux takes the trouble to place the young homilist in a picture such as a painter might arrange—before a table, with a rack for selected books at hand within easiest reach, with his own commonplace books neatly jostling those which have been compiled by others and published at moderate prices, and with a stately row of books on Scripture, dogmatic theology, the Fathers, and ascetical writers:

> There is another practical point of real importance to sermon writers, which must be mentioned.
>
> A carpenter at his bench in the workshop takes care to have the tools that he is likely to want, either in a rack before him, or in a basket by his side. He can thus pick up what he needs without waste of time. The writer of a sermon has similarly a specific work to do, and in like manner requires his tools—*i. e.*, his books of reference—ready to hand.

This is assuredly concrete—the picture of a table in the priest's room devoted exclusively to sermon paraphernalia, with a rack or bookcase at hand containing all—and only—the books he should consult for his sermon. Mr. Vaux's

catalogue of such seems to him fairly restricted, but it is generous withal, including as he says, "a few purely Spiritual books, such as 'The Imitation,' 'The Spiritual Combat,' and some of St. Francis de Sales' works."

This *mise en scène* occurs in the very Preface to the little book. When the sermonizer, having through years of study in the seminary prepared himself remotely for his great work, comes to the actual labor of writing a sermon, he sits himself down before this well-furnished table, eats, digests, dreams; awakes, writes his sketch, amplifies, memorizes in full or in outline.

We must now leave Mr. Vaux—although he has much other good advice to give—and glance at the fuller details given by other writers.

The homilist being set down to his task, we may listen to the Bishop of Ripon, who in his *Lectures on Preaching* takes excellent care to warn us that sermon-writing should not be prepared for by a wild ride through books for thoughts and suggestions. "We can understand," he says, "how Haydn never attempted to compose till he had prayed. Upon the instrument of Gounod the head of the Christ was carved, to remind him of Him whose presence and power could sanctify and elevate human work. The preacher should not be behind such men as these" (p. 28). Again:

The first qualification for writing a sermon is, that you should have something to say. No man can carve a statue until he has the stone ready; no man can mould a figure till he has the clay; and no man should imagine that he can write his sermon till he has something to say. You will not wonder that I reiterate this, because many a man sits down in his study of a Saturday to write his Sunday's sermon and finds himself the victim of blank despair, and racks his brain with anxiety because he is conscious that he has nothing to say. Now an authority tells us that whenever a preacher finds he has nothing to say, he may be sure that the fault lies in himself. We must certainly agree with him; for if there is anything great and glorious in Christianity, it is extraordinary that any man charged to preach should find himself with nothing to say (p. 76).

If a man is to have something to say, he must have material at his command:

First, get your material. You will not find in handbooks on oratory many suggestions respecting the method by which to accumulate material. But there is one simple method. If I may borrow the example, consecrated by usage for many generations, I would bid you remember the three Rs, which lie at the root of all true knowledge, the same, with one exception, as those with which we are familiar. The three Rs I would suggest are Reflection, Reading, and (the precedent warrants the inaccuracy) Writing (pp. 80-1).

Not Reading is placed first, but Reflection. For "it is indispensable that before we write we should think." Thinking shows us our lacks,

and we then are led consciously to fill those lacks by well-directed reading, to which we go with an appetite, a hunger, for the truth. This counsel is practical, although against the general advice to "read ourselves full" of a subject.

The Rev. John Watson, known to readers of *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* by his pen-name of Ian Maclaren, delivered the Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale University in 1896 and published them with the title of *The Cure of Souls.* He is nothing if not chatty and interesting, one would say while reading his book. He is more, however. For there is, in the midst of his cheerful badinage, great seriousness and not a little practical suggestiveness for preachers, and a kindly spiritual-mindedness that is at times Catholic and therefore wholesome. Howbeit, let us hear him in brief extracts that cannot quite do him justice.

He declares a sermon to be the result of six processes: Selection, Separation, Illumination, Meditation, Elaboration, Revision.

A preacher does not select his text or theme —rather does it choose him, suddenly, some day as he is visiting the sick, or studying at home, or walking the crowded street, or "wandering over the purple heather." He ought "at once to put this idea in a large book, with six pages at its command, for they will be needed. Some

slight note may be made of this first meeting and its incidents. . . . Sometimes the idea immediately fascinates. . . . Sometimes the idea actually repels. . . . One by one those ideas that have come out from a multitude and seized the mind will grow into sermons, and meantime any glimpses of them in quiet hours and any chance interview with them must be recorded. Such notes are all prolegomena to the discourse, pencil sketches from which the picture will be painted" (p. 13).

Separation consists in weaning the idea from its relatives—a process which "is absolutely necessary in the interests of the sermon. . . . Some sermons are crowded with related doctrines—the connection is often very slender—which brawl together and jostle one another in a very confusing and irritating fashion. . . . 'He's a good preacher'—a Highland gamekeeper was describing his minister—'but he scatters terribly.' It is the difference between a single rifle bullet which, if it hits, kills, and a charge of small shot which only peppers" (p. 17).

The next process is Illumination (p. 21). Having separated his Idea from its relatives, the student now "sets his bare, cold lifeless idea in the lights of all he has read, has seen, has felt, has suffered. He has mercilessly with-

drawn it from its environment that it may be his own; now he restores it to the wide world that it may live, and according to the wideness and richness of the student's world will be the glow, the red blood of his sermon."

The fourth process is Meditation (p. 23). "And now for two days this idea must be removed from the light, where reason and imagination have their sphere, and be hidden away in the dark chambers of the soul. This is not an intellectual proposition to be asserted and proved, or a fancy to be tracked out and exhibited. This is a spiritual truth to be commended to faith, a living principle to be enforced on conscience. It must, therefore, be first imprinted on the preacher's soul till it has become a part of his own being, before he can really understand or declare it."

The fifth process is Elaboration (p. 26). Here we find the concrete looming up so largely—we may style it the "practical" if we like—that space may well be given to large quotation:

> It will be observed that not one sentence of the sermon has as yet been composed, and so on Friday morning the minister proceeds to the fifth process—*Elaboration.*
>
> He now sits down at his desk and places before him thirty small pieces of paper. [This is an *obiter dictum,* for if one should say, "Why not two sheets of foolscap?" I can only express amazement at his

commonplace contrivance. My plan, as will appear, is much more ingenious, and is an invention. It is with us, as with the medical profession, a rule to patent nothing, but to offer every discovery for the use of our brethren.]

Let each thought, illustration, application, that has occurred to the minister under his idea be committed to one of those scraps. Just as one remembers them; in no sequence—a mere mob of recollections. It is, of course, taken for granted that each must be, as it were, the legitimate child of that idea. No vagrants are to be picked up and adopted. [For these the minister has another book, a sort of Foundling Asylum for homeless and nameless thoughts, but out of which some very good children may come.]

When the heap is complete, behold the raw material, selected, picked, dyed, ready now for the mill that shall weave the loose disconnected threads into pattern and cloth, or, if it please you, to revert to a former image, the print must now be taken off the negative. This heap of thought-stuff is an alphabet, with every letter there, but all unarranged. It is the student's business to spread the letters out on his table, and to survey them carefully till he lights on A and B and C, and on to X Y Z. For he knows that thought follows a certain order, and it is the same order in the mind of a peasant as a philosopher, only in the former case some of the letters are wanting—blank spaces—and some are dim. Educated people resent a sermon where A comes in the middle of the alphabet and S precedes M, and they are not appeased by the fact that they have had all the letters somehow; and it may be worth saying that people without culture are almost as dissatisfied by a disorderly sermon. Hearers have an action of damages against a preacher who rambles and comes again on his own track, because it is disheartening to follow a guide whose

progress is a zigzag, and because it is plain that he has scamped his work. . . .

. . . Something there will be before A, especially when a man is young—an introduction which used to extend back to the creation of the world and the purposes of God, and now embraces the latest results of criticism on the book from which the text is taken. . . . This generation desires to be ushered into the subject of the day without wearisome preliminaries, and nothing will more certainly take the edge off the appetite than a laborious preface. . . .

Something will come after Z—a striking and eloquent peroration, and, although this sounds cruel to a degree, this ought also to be suppressed. When a sermon has culminated after a natural fashion, it ought to end, leaving its effect to rest not on rhetoric but on truth. There may be times when for effect the sermon may cease suddenly some letters before Z, because the audience has surrendered without terms and the sermon has served its purpose.

When a speaker is pleading a great cause, and sees hard-headed men glaring before them with such ferocity that every one knows they are afraid of breaking down, let him stop in the middle of a paragraph and take the collection—

(One is tempted to stop in the middle of this paragraph, not indeed to "take the collection," but to indulge in a good-natured smile at what may seem to be a sly bit of humor but is doubtless intended seriously, since the pulpit orator is here "pleading a great cause," probably connected with some missionary enterprise)—

—and if he be declaring the Evangel, and a certain tenderness comes over the faces of the people, let

him close his words to them and call them to prayer. Speech can be too lengthy, too formal, too eloquent, too grammatical. For one to lose his toilsome introduction, in which he happened to mention two Germans, with quotations, and his twice-written conclusion, in which he had that pretty fancy from Tennyson, is hard to flesh and blood. It is worse than the "Massacre of the Innocents"—it is infanticide; but in those sacrifices of self the preacher's strength lies, on them the blessing of God rests. Broken sentences, when the speaker could not continue, unfinished sermons, when the Spirit of God was working powerfully, have wrought marvels beyond all the wisdom of the schools.

The sixth process, Revision, is interestingly treated, but need not detain us here.

The Rev. John Neville wrote a helpful little book on *The Use of the Eyes in Preaching* (London, 1911), in which he strongly advocates extempore preaching and practically illustrates the use of mechanical details. He takes the text, "For she said within herself, 'If I may but touch His garments, I shall be whole,'" (Matt. 9:21), and treats it according to the following methods. Illustrating the first of the two methods, he says:

> In the introduction strive to bring the congregation into sympathy with this poor woman, make them feel glad that she is about to receive a great blessing. Then be careful that the divisions of the sermon are simple and natural, something like this:

I. Disease, and what to do with it.
II. The Physician, and how to reach Him.
III. Health, and how to secure it.

Take the first division. Put yourself in the hands of your Teacher. Ask for guidance and expect it, and begin writing down the thoughts as they come. Keep on until you seem to have got to the end. You will be able to weed out what you don't want and arrange in proper order afterwards (p. 64).

He illustrates the three points of the division in great detail, and in order to economize space, we shall content ourselves with looking at his way of treating only the first point of the division:

I. DISEASE, AND WHAT TO DO WITH IT

1. Her disease, suffered twelve years.
2. What she had done with it. The result.
3. What she now does. Introduce Jesus.
4. Your disease. In you 6, 12, 24, and 36 years.
5. Diagnose it. Tongue, eye, ear, hand, foot, heart, brain.
6. Human treatment deals with effects.
7. Shut eye. Curb tongue. Stop ear, etc.
8. Thief to steal no more. Liar to lie no more, etc.
9. This is to paint leprosy, to make it appear like health.
10. Disease of sin is deeper, beyond human reach.
11. To cut off hand that stole, to cut out tongue that lied, is not to remove the desire from the heart.
12. What shall be done?
13. Bring the diseased heart to Jesus.

Commenting on this fairly abundant series of sub-points, the author appropriately says:

Now look over the thoughts and rearrange if necessary. Perhaps 11 should follow 8. When you write the thoughts again change the order, make whatever change you think necessary until the ideas follow in natural order. This makes easy work for the memory, as while you are arranging and rearranging, you will be fixing the whole division in your memory. And you will find that the mind will be active all the time in producing a crop of thoughts *about the thoughts*. This cannot be described; it must be experienced to be appreciated.

He then proceeds to give a similar tableau for the second and third points of the division. He continues:

Now go through the first part again, cutting out all needless words and thoughts. You may find that two thoughts are much alike, and that one will express all you want to say. Remove one. Be careful not to overload, as the less fettered the mind is the more vigorous it will be during the delivery of the sermon. If you have too much, the application will have to be hurried.

The first point, revised after this fashion, may appeal like this:

I. DISEASE, AND WHAT TO DO WITH IT

1. Hers, twelve years.
2. Her effort.
3. Change of method.

4. Your disease chronic.
5. Diagnose. Tongue, etc.
6. Treating effects.
7. Remove hand no cure stealing.
8. Amputation and propensities.
9. What to do?
10. Go to Jesus.
    Apply, "Thy sins, though many," etc.

Once more is this first point to be revised in order that it shall next appear in monosyllabic form:

I. DISEASE, AND WHAT TO DO WITH IT

1. Hers.
2. Effort.
3. Change.
4. Yours.
5. Diagnose.
6. Amputation.
7. Deeper.
8. Jesus.

The writer is gradually reducing his thoughts to the form of a sketch for memorizing easily. Although his purpose is to give aids to extempore preaching, it is clear that such a scheme might help those who intend to write out their sermons in full and to memorize them word for word. The monosyllables are practically catchwords impressed on the memory as a draughtsman's sketch might be placed on a blackboard for easy contemplation.

Upon this final monosyllabic form the writer comments as follows:

> This or something like it will be the final arrangement, not arrived at quite so quickly as shown here perhaps, but this supplies the plan of working, and the end aimed at. Leave it for a time, and look over the second and third division in the same way.

We need not, however, follow him here. The illustration of the first point will suffice. But when the three points of the division have been thus satisfactorily condensed after manifold revision, what is the preacher to do with the completed plan? "Fix it in the memory," is the answer. How? The writer declares that the answer to this question "is of the utmost importance." The sketch or plan "must not be learned as a piece of poetry is." He continues:

> It must be written through, repeatedly, until it can be done from memory. It will be found at first that in some cases the single word does not bring back to mind all that was written. Very well, refer back and refresh the memory. Soon the single word will be ample for the purpose. It will also be discovered that, in going over the plan again and again with the pen, the mind will expand. Not only will the order of the words be fixed in the memory, but all the time the mind will be evolving thoughts and ideas which will be a source of delight. It is a splendid exercise in invention. An actual experiment will show there is no waste, but, on the contrary, an enormous gain.

> I am assuming that all the preparation will be gone through in constant dependence on the Holy Spirit's aid. . . . When all is ready, and just before going before your people, take a piece of paper and write your plan, that you may be sure it is in your memory.

The author believes that the written plan will not have to be resorted to once in a hundred times, that it can be departed from with ease on the spur of the moment and returned to with equal ease, and that by a little practice the preacher can modify the train of thought so as to meet conditions which the proper use of the eyes may make known to him.

The author offers another method of preparing the sermon. He calls it "the growing method." In illustration, he takes a text from the same Gospel narrative, but works it out differently. Upon a long sheet of paper the three points are written at equal distances apart. If no thoughts come upon point one, go to point two or point three. If no ideas come, write the three points again, and finally thoughts will flow. Categorize, revise, condense, as before.

Some authors apparently prefer not to avail themselves of such mechanical helps. After appropriate material has been amassed in the mind, they advise the sermonizer to set down thoughts at first with little order and to revise

in cooler moments. Dr. English thus remarks (*For Pulpit and Platform,* p. 112):

1. Do not defer the work of composition till late in the week. . . .
2. Write as much as possible at a single sitting. —The continuousness of composition imparts to it, as Shedd says: "A certain flow and flood." Carlyle: "Such swiftness of mere writing after due energy of preparation is doubtless the right method; the hot furnace having long worked and simmered, let the pure gold flow out at one gush."
3. "Write with fury"; that is, write rapidly provided always that you write with reasonable accuracy. "Facility is the result of forgotten toil." Quintilian: "Let our pen be at first slow, provided that it be accurate. By writing quickly we are not brought to write well, but by writing well we are brought to write quickly."
4. Do not stop to correct while in the glow of composition.
5. If composition grows slow and tedious, stop and read what you have written. This process tends to impart to the mind a fresh impetus toward writing, somewhat as the leaper runs over a certain ground that with gathered velocity he may leap the further.

This method of composition is to be followed by the work of correction. Dr. English devotes rather more space to this point than to the work of composition.

Dr. Greer (*The Preacher and His Place,* p. 181) believed in jotting down clearly the notes for his extempore speaking:

After I have found my subject I go to work, of course, to think about and develop it, and I do my thinking about it to some extent in words. I think with a pencil in my hand; and many of the thoughts as they come to me I try to express on paper, especially if when they come to me they are not clear. I try to make them clear by putting them into words and giving expression to them; and while I do not memorize that expression, I find that in preaching it often comes to me easily, naturally, and without any effort on my part to recall it. It is simply an instance of mnemonic aid that is furnished by clear thinking. That, however, is but an incidental result, and my purpose in writing, as far as I do write, is simply to make sure that I apprehend with distinctness the thought that is in my mind. I want to make sure that I have it, and not that I merely seem to have it. . . . And so I go through with my subject, writing a little every now and then. . . .

Advocating extempore sermonizing, Dr. Storrs says (*Preaching Without Notes,* p. 37):

I wrote for many years, fully, and carefully. I now write only a brief outline of the discourse, covering usually one or two sheets of common note-paper, and have no notes before me in the pulpit—not a line or a catch-word.

His brief, however, represents much toil of thinking:

As you first think the subject carefully through, subordinate trains of thought will occur, illustrating the main one; passages in literature will be suggested, perhaps; historical examples; Scriptural analogies; scenes in nature, or startling passages in personal ex-

perience; all bearing upon the subject, and which rise to your mind in instant and fit connection with it. It is well, I think, to make a brief memorandum of such, indicating them at least by a line or a catchword on the brief. When you go through the subject again, say on Saturday evening, some of these will again occur, and others will not; but in place of those which do not come back, if your mind is in an active and a fruitful condition, others will suggest themselves. Now look at your notes, and add references to these, noticing again what you previously had thought of, but now have overlooked. . . . Then go and preach. . . . Then give it as it comes. Never stop to recall anything which you are vaguely and doubtfully conscious of having purposed to say, but which has somehow slipped from your thought. . . Men are not responsive to an introverted mind. . . . And if your mind is not with the people, but hunting for something back of yourself, you might much better be saying nothing.

Dr. Lyman (*Preaching in the New Age,* page 108) believes in getting "stirred all through by something fine" and then, he says, "write rapidly; dash along. Never mind correctness. For the moment, forget rules. . . . Pour everything into expression, just as it naturally comes —thought, emotion, passion, the entire real manhood of you, all quiveringly alive on the page. Then, two days after, . . . correct the extravagances of your work. You will cut away a third of it, half of it, only you will not cut the life of it away, and it will be alive." But he believes in some apparatus withal:

I believe the best general idea of manuscript help for most men in preaching to-day is that of the "brief," as the lawyers would say,—an outline, more or less complete, of what the man intends to deliver, with some parts perhaps written out in full, and with careful literary finish, and other parts just "blazed through," as the lumbermen say in going through a new piece of timber, so allowing the freest play to the inspiration of the moment when facing the audience. . . . Just a hint here as to the use of the manuscript in the pulpit. The best method I have ever discovered (and I *had* to discover it—necessity in that case was the mother of invention), is so variedly to distribute the crow tracks of one's writing on the page as that the *mere sight of the page,* or of *two or three largely written or underscored* "catch words" on it, will recall to one's memory the *entire page;* so that you can have your sermon entirely written out, and yet read it so that nobody will know that it is written" (p. 113).

All of the suggestions and advice culled in a previous chapter from Catholic, and in the present chapter from non-Catholic, sources, assume the necessity of an orderly preparation of the sermon. They imply much meditation, reading, writing. Bacon's dictum applies here. The preacher must be full of his subject (from reflection and reading), must be exact in his presentation of truth (writing is here demanded), must be facile in his diction (conference or frequent preaching will achieve this).

Our thoughts must be orderly in their arrangement. Boyd-Carpenter well says: "You

remember that Demosthenes said action was the first, the second, and the third requisite for an orator. Of the sermon I would say that the first requisite is order, the second order, and the third order; without order there is no sermon. In many sermons this is disregarded; but order is imperatively needed for the sermon's sake, for the people's sake, and for your own" (*Lectures on Preaching,* p. 129). Order, indeed, is said to be Heaven's first law.

Mechanical apparatus suggests orderly thinking, but it will not of itself produce thinking. The orderly-minded preacher will not necessarily confine himself to one method in preparing his sermons, although it is true that a set framework saves much time and trouble. He will doubtless seek the pleasure of variety, the spice of sermonizing. For order does not imply sameness in methods.

XIV

SERMON NOTE-BOOKS

IN HIS *Homiletic and Catechetic Studies*,[1] Mgr. Meyenberg seems to take for granted, on the part of young preachers, the use of homiletic note-books. Speaking of the "popular" sermon, he recommends, amongst other things, the methodical reading of "popular" writers and preachers (p. 79), such as St. Chrysostom, St. Augustine, Bourdaloue. But all such reading should be done, he says, "with pen in hand," and the preacher "should place in his gathered cornucopiae popular passages upon some important ideas, for instance, faith, grace, cross, death, love of neighbor, justice, etc., or note the places where these may be found" (p. 80).

Every encomium should be passed on the habit of diligent note-taking. Clement of Alexandria wrought well and pleasantly in his Stromata. You can translate the word quite representatively by "Miscellanies," or you can

[1] New York, 1919.

render it pleasantly by "Tapestries" (with one of his admirers), or by "Carpet Bags" (with another genial spirit). Howbeit, Clement thought well of his own labors. "They are for me," he said, "a collection which can serve my old age as a storehouse to remedy the defects of memory and to present to me, albeit as in a blurred mirror or a lifeless painting, the vivid and animated discourses of those men, saintly and worthy of all praise, whose disciple it was my good fortune to be."

To read without taking notes was, in the mind of Pope St. Damasus, merely to sit a-dreaming: *Lectio sine stylo somnium est.* St. Charles Borromeo advised the preacher to compile a handy commonplace book: *Locos sibi comparabit quibus auditorum animi commoveri atque incitari solent ad Dei amorem.* For we read easily and easily forget. Moreover, we are apt to read hazily: *Ego autem,* said St. Augustine, *multa nesciebam, scribendo didicisse me profiteor.*

The practice of note-taking is, indeed, common to thoughtful men. It is of special value to the preacher. But a practical difficulty is encountered here: What is the best method of imprisoning a flying thought in the amber of the written word?

The first point for consideration might be the

instrument—pen or pencil? Objections to the pencil are that it requires frequent sharpening (an objection not of great value in these days of cheap devices for sharpening and of the self-sharpening pencil); that if the lead be hard the page becomes indented, and if soft becomes very easily blurred. The advantages of the pencil are its cheapness and ease of writing.

The pen is much better, and the fountain-pen makes unnecessary the elaborate contrivance described by an admirer of Hobbes. When Hobbes was engaged on his *Leviathan,* "he walked much and contemplated," says John Aubrey, "and he had in the head of his cane a pen and inkhorn, carried always a note-book in his pocket, and as soon as a thought darted, he presently entered it into his booke, or otherwise might have lost it. He had drawne the designe of the booke into chapters, and knew where about it would come in. Thus that booke was made."

The next appropriate question might be, Upon what shall we write—a note-book like that which Hobbes carried in his pocket? or a copy-book like that which we used in schooldays? or the larger note-books of college days? or the loose-sheet note-book now so much in vogue? or large "commercial note" paper, to be filed in heavy paper covers or in portfolios? or upon

cards of any convenient size, to be filed in a cabinet-drawer and to constitute a homiletical file-index? or in an elaborately made Index-book?

Beginning with the last-mentioned device, we should remember that it is designed rather for indexing than for transcription. One which we have seen is entitled "Universal Index." It has oblong leaves divided into columns with these headings: Subject, Event, Illustration, etc.; Book, Magazine, Paper, etc.; Vol., Year, etc.; Chap., Sec., etc.; Page; Col.; Remarks. The book has indented alphabetical guides to the pages. It is a most elaborate device, which supposes great patience and much leisure, and which experience leads us to suppose hardly suitable for the homiletic industry of most men. There are of course the ordinary scrap-books for clippings, with pages for indexing subjects. Some of these are mucilaged conveniently—but water is not always at hand, and saliva is not properly serviceable here, and the wet sponge of banking institutions is rare in private houses. If the clippings be thrown into a box, however, an otherwise idle hour may be devoted to pasting or to wetting the mucilaged page.

The loose-page note-book is convenient; the copy-book is usually too large for easy transportation; the pocket note-book might be profitably

very small and be employed rather for a short reference to book or magazine or newspaper than for transcription.

But for purposes of permanent transcription, cards are best. They can be had in many convenient sizes, with cabinets made for them with alphabetical index cards as guides.

What do the writers of homiletical works advise? Perhaps we shall find there both useful suggestions and encouraging words.

Mgr. Meyenberg advises a topical arrangement of our notes. Under such headings as Grace, Justice, Love of Neighbor, and the like, he would have the preacher note down the thoughts of popular writers and sermonizers.

In his *L'art d'écrire,*[2] M. Albalat declares that confusing results will attend the method of classifying notations according to the order of ideas, inasmuch as these are sometimes differentiated by slight *nuances,* are apt to be merged one into the other, to overlap, and to leave us without mastery over them. He favors greatly a classification by authors and an alphabetical arrangement—a sort of card-index, with cards of sufficient size for quotations and personal comment. His purview is not homiletical, however, and Mgr. Meyenberg's topical scheme is

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[2] Paris, 1909, p. 30.

doubtless satisfactory for our purpose. He offers no suggestion as to methods of convenience—copy-books, note-books, portfolios, or cards.

The Abbé Guesdon devotes [3] not a little space to his method of making notes. The most practical arrangement consists, he thinks, in placing our notes in an alphabetical repertory. This can be purchased ready-made, with printed titles. Still better, it can be home-made—"*voici comment*":

You select a stiff-backed portfolio or stiff pasteboard and upon it place your sheets of paper of convenient size and shape. At the top of the sheets of paper you write large and very comprehensive titles or headings, such as (for Dogma): God, Jesus Christ, Mary, the Church; (for the Sacraments): Grace, Baptism, Penance, Eucharist, Priesthood; (for the Virtues): Theological Virtues severally, Religion, Humility, etc.; (for the Decalogue): Prayer Vows, Sunday, Family, Society, etc.

In respect of all this, you make two columns with double margins. In one of the columns you put citations from the Holy Scriptures, the Fathers, orators—in a word, your authorities.

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[3] *Cours d'éloquence sacrée.* I. *Les principes* (Paris, 1905), pp. 108-110.

In the other column you put your own comments on each topic.

You will assign to more suggestive titles some additional pages. These may be easily taken away in their detached form as occasion may suggest or demand.

Similarly, you can make a repertory, arranged topically, for clippings from reviews and newspapers, and also for striking passages from the classics and other authors.

In his volume on *Preaching*,[4] Father O'Dowd writes with kindly recognition of man's instability of purpose: "There are many ways of taking notes. The worst of all is to jot them down on an old envelope, which will almost inevitably get lost. Another bad way (for most men at least) is to buy a large book and resolve to write down neatly whatever strikes you in your reading as fit to be noted. This is not a bad method in itself, but usually it is frustrated by our want of perseverance. An easy, human scheme of note-taking is to copy not merely what is striking, but *very* striking, on one of a thousand or so pieces of plain white cardboard, place it in a drawer, and occasionally spend an hour in sorting out an accumulation of these detached notes. Each sheaf can then be kept apart in a

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[4] 1919, p. 29.

small division of a drawer set aside for passages which in all probability would otherwise have slipped from memory. There is a still easier, though not so satisfactory a way—that of noting on the fly-leaf of any book we may be reading the number of the page in the volume on which a noteworthy passage occurred together with a word or so descriptive of its drift. Each man knows what method best suits him, only let him be careful not to mark too many references, for that would defeat the end of the note-taking. Let him confine himself to marking passages that are likely to be really useful. In view of their purpose the notes most helpful will be those which contribute something actual, vivid, illuminating—not necessarily 'purple patches' to be stitched on here and there, but penetrating views of religious truths, well-expressed illustrations, neat comparisons and analogies, pregnant maxims. Our purpose is not served by making a note of passages which can be met almost anywhere, and copying down truisms which we encounter in every manual." The writer then gives some extracts illustrating the kind of passages which might well be noted or transcribed.

Notes can be taken on train or steamboat and can thus be made to serve the double purpose of enriching our homiletic storehouse and of re-

lieving the tedium of travel. The President of Chicago Theological Seminary tells [5] us how to supplant Hobbes's pocket note-book and cane with inkhorn: "I carry," he writes, "a few plain 3 by 5 cards and, when I am traveling, a tube of library paste . . . I used to carry pocket scissors and have them now. But the point of a knife (sharp) is better than scissors. If I run down a short clipping or want to make a note, it is easy to stick either of them on a card with paste or pen and then to file it. Longer clippings go in the file in the study."

The method which has just been described seems to be both simple and efficient. Clippings need not be transcribed or even pasted in a homiletic scrap-book. The ordinary library card—a thousand can be bought cheaply—can serve to save the clipping and to index it at the same time. Cross-reference cards should be made, however. The process of cross-indexing will not be without fatigue and careful estimate of appropriate title, but it will be profitable in the end.

Ephemeral periodicals may be cut to pieces without anxiety. Even books may be properly so treated if they furnish much material and can be replaced easily; for although the business

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[5] *Homiletic Review*, April, 1920.

man thinks of time in terms of money—"Time is money," he declares—his estimate is quite too low. It is cheaper to buy another copy of a book than to transcribe much of its matter into a MS. book of reference or upon a library card.

If the selected matter is rather lengthy and occurs in a volume which may not justifiably suffer mutilation, the library card can make a simple reference to the volume and page (perhaps also the edition), under appropriate title and cross-reference title.

Of course if one have much leisure for scholarly work, the mere effort involved in transcription tends to fix the matter more firmly in the memory. I recall a student in the seminary whose method of learning his history lesson consisted in writing the lesson out in full.

In collecting, from various sources, the suggestions noted in the present chapter, I have been struck by the curious fact that the larger the volumes consulted the less space they gave to methods of preserving and indexing sermon material. Meyenberg gives us a royal octavo volume of some 850 pages, and devotes but a few lines to encouraging the reader to use commonplace books. He suggests headings for our extracts, but goes no further. O'Dowd gives us a volume of 230 duodecimo pages and spends time in suggesting particularized methods, esti-

mating their relative value and furnishing illustrative extracts. Hoppin issued a *Homiletics* of 800 pages and does not even mention a commonplace book. Vaux publishes [6] a slim volume of 250 small pages and, while recommending that a preacher should have several commonplace books (p. 120), illustrates by a very lengthy excerpt how such material can be turned to profit for sermonizing. A very popular manual in Protestant seminaries has been Broadus's *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons.* The thirty-seventh edition contains 560 pages. Holding thus a middle place between the longer and the shorter books on preaching, we are not surprised that it should recommend commonplace books only with some qualifications, and should dispense wholly with suggestions of method:

> Whether it is better to make extracts, summaries, and references in a Commonplace Book, or to rely mainly on memory in reading, will depend on a man's turn of mind and general habits, and on the kind of reading in question. Even a man of extraordinary memory can hardly dispense with memoranda in reading books of information; while books of thought, though they may be profitably analyzed in writing, should be thought over, thought through and through, and then all that is cognate to our own thinking will

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[6] *Preaching: What to Preach and How to Preach* (London, 1882).

be without difficulty retained. As regards whatever is not matter of pure thought, an important part of the benefit derived from reading is this, that one will always know where to look for what he wants; and this can be best accomplished by a system of reference, unless the power of local memory is found, upon fair trial, to suffice for the purpose. Whichever method one adopts, he must strive to make the best of it, guarding carefully against its disadvantages and dangers (p. 126).

This is the total treatment. Do the best you can with the method which, on the whole, commends itself to your temperament and abilities as most suitable.

The Commonplace Book! One hears the inevitable query of the listless reader, *Cui bono?* If one will listen further, one will doubtless hear as well the long development of the theme suggested by the query. For we know with what enthusiasm we buy a portentously large quotation-album for personal contributions, how lovingly we gaze at the large white pages that await the glorification of enrichments from our select and varied reading, how satisfied we are with the ample Index-pages that shall methodize our work for us—and we know how seldom we succeed in filling a page with transcriptions. The volume gathers dust in some obscure corner of our sitting-room (shall we call it our "library" or, as the President of Chicago

Theological Seminary does not hesitate to style it, our "study"?).

Cui bono? What's the use of starting a thing which our experience warns us we shall never keep up?

The warning or reminder of experience is valuable. Certainly, we need not undertake a laboriously exact and exacting Index of Quotations that are to be transcribed with pen and ink. A little patient effort may nevertheless enable us to accomplish very much that will prove helpful to us when we face the task of writing a sermon. The card-index is worth a serious trial.

Perhaps the subject could not be more fittingly dismissed than with the rather long treatment accorded it in a series of lectures recently delivered by a noted Scottish clergyman,[7] whose volume meanwhile is not devoted exclusively to preaching in general, and is withal of modest dimensions. He evidently considered the topic "worth while," although not closely pertinent to his general theme:

> The next question that arises is that of retaining the constantly accumulating stores of material, and especially of retaining them in such a way as that they shall be available for use on appropriate occasions. For this, many devices have been invented,

[7] Kelman, *The War and Preaching* (1919).

such as the use of interleaved Bibles, or (as in the case of Scrivener's *Synopsis Evangelica*) Bibles whose text is printed in one corner of a wide page, leaving abundant room for annotations. In Todd's *Students' Manual,* which in the early part of the nineteenth century was one of the most familiar of American books in Scotland, the most elaborate directions are given for the construction of a Commonplace Book and an Index Rerum. The former is an indexed volume in which excerpts from books are written down. The latter is an index of subjects, showing the passages in books where references to those subjects may be found. These are mechanical devices, which, if persisted in through a lifetime, would probably put blinkers upon whatever Pegasus of free spirit and vital thinking one rode. Yet they may afford valuable training, for a time at least. Many of us began the system in our youth, but in later days abandoned it for the much simpler one of unindexed notebooks of written extracts (fewer in number as life grew busier) and references. In using such notebooks it often became apparent that certain subjects had accumulated a considerable number of extracts and references. Such subjects were transferred to a new series of notebooks, each one (ledger-like) having a page to itself, and the scattered references and extracts were thus gathered in their appropriate pages. Such methods have been found helpful by some of us, although the usefulness of any particular method must depend on the habits of the man who uses it. The main things to remember are, that there must be behind every preacher who would preserve any opulence of thought or variety of interest in his preaching, some such treasury into which he may deposit the gains of his reading and thinking, and that he will probably have to adopt some mechanical apparatus for making the stores of his treasury avail-

able. But let him beware of allowing any such mechanism to enter too much into his methods of work. When it becomes the master, it is wholly deadening and to be avoided; only when it is the helpful slave of his own free and forceful spirit is it useful. And besides all this, there will be times when subjects and messages will suddenly spring upon a preacher's mind, and find for themselves embodiment from the unconscious or subconscious material stored there, without any mechanical aids whatever. Such sermons will probably be his most inspiring and impressive utterances, while those of the former kind may be the more instructive (pp. 109–110).

The hints and counsels of Dr. Kelman in this *excursus* sum up the whole matter very well. We are grateful to him for wandering so amiably and so lengthily from his theme, *The War and Preaching,* to record the fruits of his own experience, and to do this for us in a little volume of 213 duodecimo pages. The Commonplace Book has its undoubted value. Its uses are much more varied and extensive than its dangers are proximate or obvious.

XV

SERMON MATERIAL

THE President of Chicago Theological Seminary writes entertainingly[1] about one of his methods of "Picking Up Sermon Material." He declares that his article "is a study in homiletical habits. It is boldly and without apology personal. . . . But the most useful counsel is that which comes out of experience and is concrete. It is interesting to see how some one else does his work, even if he makes a botch of it."

He argues properly that "gathering material is an essential part of the minister's work," and proceeds to illustrate his own methods of remote preparation for preaching: "I carry a few plain 3 by 5 cards and, when I am traveling, a tube of library paste . . . I used to carry pocket scissors and have them now. But the point of a knife (sharp) is better than scissors. If I run down a short clipping or want to make a note, it is easy to stick either of them on a

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[1] *Homiletic Review*, April, 1920.

card with paste or pen and then to file it. Longer clippings go in the file in the study."

He exhibits the fruits of his reading during a three-hour trip on a train. He had supplied himself with magazines of fairly ordinary popular type, and shows how, when the mind is in quest of appropriate material for building its mansions of thought, it finds what it is looking for in abundance and in the most unlikely places. Thus, from the February issue of the *American Magazine,* he makes two clippings, both of which he entitles "Ambition," and cross-references both under the title, "Humanity: Its Worth and Ourselves." He admits that librarians might object to these titles, but contends that they "suit my purpose as a preacher, so I use them." He gives several additional clippings made from other periodicals during the same trip and declares that while they manifest clearly the profits he had made by a little exercise of effort that was in itself delightful otherwise, they fall short of the fruits he had gathered in similar trips.

His cross-reference to "Humanity: Its Worth and Ourselves" reminds me that under some such heading the Catholic preacher might list the recent volume [2] from the accomplished

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[2] *Worth: Lectures by Robert Kane, S.J.* (1920).

pen of the Rev. Robert Kane, S.J., which corrects false standards of worth and establishes, with combined learning and art, the worth of matter, of mind, of patriotism, of personality. This volume would of course furnish the library file of the preacher with many cards, for it considers many questions, makes many apt appeals to intellect and heart, offers much illustrative comment.

But to return to ephemeral sources of sermon material, I find rather a large amount of space given in a small but very thoughtful volume on preaching,[3] to a single excerpt which the writer thinks well adapted to spiritual comment or illustration. He believes in commonplace books; thinks every clergyman should have two or three of them constantly at hand for entering all pertinent matter to be found in one's reading, conversation with friends, meditative moments; and while admitting that such a practice involves much trouble and effort—although not so much, when made habitual, as one is apt to suppose—promises that the sermon will probably be rendered by this practice much more attractive to the hearer. "On the day on which these lines are being written," he says (p. 121),

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[3] Vaux, *Preaching: What to Preach and How to Preach* (London, 1882).

"the *Standard* newspaper contains an account of the prairie and forest fires which have lately been rife in the far west of the United States, and the following very remarkable facts are mentioned:

The most curious feature about both forest and prairie fires is that no sooner has one passed over a district than plants and trees of different species from those which formerly grew there spring up. In Vermont, hickory has covered spots where, before the forest was destroyed by fire, not a single tree of that species was known. The country round the head waters of the Delaware, Alleghany and Genesee rivers, now covered with hemlock, beech, and sugar maple, was originally an oak forest; and in Georgia, oak and hickory lands, when cleared, invariably grow up with pine. In the region about Green Bay, Wisconsin, overrun by the fires of 1871, dense growths of poplars and beeches succeeded the firs and deciduous trees destroyed. In the vicinity of the Slave Lake, the land laid waste by fire produces nothing but poplars, in place of spruce, pine, and white birch, though none of the new trees were seen previously on the ground they now cover. In Alabama, pine, under the same circumstances, is succeeded by oak; and—not to multiply examples of a curious fact—in Nebraska, ash, elm, and bog elder follow cottonwood, and in Florida, black-jack oak the long-leafed pine. The seeds of these trees seem to be lying dormant in the soil until stimulated into life by the passage of the flame, as was the yellow rocket which made gay the waste places of London after the Great Fire, though the plant had previously been unknown in the district. Hence—and, in a misfortune so sad, it is pleasant to find some cause for satisfaction—the

Michigan fire is not likely to permanently injure the land. If it has destroyed houses, fences, barns, cattle, crops, and, unhappily, their owners also, it will have aided in clearing some ground that needed clearing, and it may possibly end in giving an artificial fillip to the soil over which it has swept.

"Now, the substance of this paragraph, if graphically set before a congregation, would furnish a most telling illustration of the different effects which affliction produces upon different persons; how that in some instances it acts upon them for good, and in others for harm, according to the 'ground of the heart' which is affected thereby; and how it often evokes certain elements in man's nature which have previously existed only in their germs. And, be it noted, the illustration would be all the more telling because it brought in a curious fact in natural history, which, though it might soon be forgotten by one who skimmed through a casual article in a newspaper, and immediately turned to something else totally different, would pretty certainly be remembered in connection with its application, if brought before a man in the course of a sermon."

Such a long newspaper clipping as the above could not, without much fatigue, be copied in long-hand in one of the commonplace books recommended by the writer. It could, however,

be conveniently pasted on a card and filed, as suggested by the President of Chicago Theological Seminary.

Needless to say, the long account of the newspaper could not well be repeated in a sermon. Its central thought, its speculative comment thereupon, and the illustrative suggestion it contains for the preacher, might be developed in a sermon.

A very "telling" illustration of this kind was used by Mgr. J. F. Loughlin in a sermon on Ireland's history. He compared the Isle of Saints and Scholars to a giant oak over which the furious storms of persecution have passed, leaving it apparently a naked horror of leafless branches. But God could draw good out of the affliction. The same hurricane that denuded the oak, carried its countless acorns into all the lands of earth, and peopled their solitudes with forests of oak. In God's holy designs, Ireland was to become the glad mother of many children, the nursery of missions or missionaries to all the lands of earth.

Mr. Vaux drew the lesson of our varied reactions to affliction. He might also have drawn the consolatory reflection suggested by the strikingly beautiful Italian saying, "When God shuts a door, He opens a window."

Apropos of this, we may quote Mr. Vaux

again: "And while speaking of commonplace books for MS. extracts as a very necessary part of a clergyman's tool-chest, one devoted to the transcription of pointed and telling aphorisms and other brief passages in such old or current literature as may come under his notice, may be mentioned as by no means the least important" (p. 122).

Speaking (p. 21) of clergymen who attain a real knowledge of the teaching value of Scripture only after coming into charge of a parish, Mr. Vaux says: " . . . in his private Bible-reading a clergyman of this class would be wise in having his congregation constantly in view, and should have a commonplace book by his side, in which he might jot down a memorandum of homiletical ideas which strike him in the course of his study. Indeed, an earnest clergyman should keep this idea in view whatever books he reads, or whatever company he is in. The Sunday sermons are generally regarded as rather painful necessities. If a clergyman had at hand a thoroughly good stock of really interesting material, especially Scriptural material, out of which he could feel that he could teach his people effectively, the preparation of his sermons would be a real pleasure, rather than the painful task that it often is now."

I have heard that Archbishop Ryan, "the

Chrysostom of the West," had filled several volumes of MS. with notes for sermons. These notes comprised mention of occurrences of which he was an observer or in which he was a participant, thoughts that flashed across his mind during his reading, fruits of his daily meditation, and the like. The notes severally bore interpretative or descriptive titles, and doubtless were carefully indexed. His immediate preparation for preaching was—at least in his later years—to go to Overbrook Seminary on Friday evening, furnished, I think, with a sheaf of his MS. notes. A curious detail was the background he set for his cogitation. We at once knew of his presence in the Seminary by hearing a music-box tinkling faintly in the air. Moore's Melodies especially attracted him. Their influence was evidently soothing, inspiring, "harmonizing." At all events, he would return to town early on Saturday morning, equipped with matter carefully selected and well arranged for his sermon of Sunday morning. He needed but a slight proximate preparation, for an easy consultation of his appropriate notes made in past years served his purpose admirably.

Perhaps it was by a somewhat similar way that Father McKenna, the noted Dominican preacher and missionary, prepared himself for

a casual and informal discourse. At all events, the method could have been used by him in a sermon which I heard him deliver at Mass in a summer resort. One who heard that sermon could not easily evade its pungent moral or easily forget its elegantly simple manner. The burden of the brief discourse was a personal anecdote—a thing which had happened to himself. The occurrence was simplicity itself, but it had features which he noticed and noted in his memory, it had lessons which his meditative mind could properly discern and estimate, it had appeals which his sensitive rhetoric knew how to direct to every human heart. Had he indexed the occurrence? Probably so.

The things which we ourselves have seen are more usable than the more notable things that have happened to others. Our own thoughts are generally better for our own use than the more striking thoughts of other people. All this is true; and it is also true that merely to transcribe or to clip, even though we faithfully index our commonplace book or cross-reference our card-index, is to do but little by way of furnishing our mind with appropriate material for sermons. In some way we must make the matter our own, albeit there are occasions when the exact words of another thinker may very well be repeated by a conscientious preacher.

Such commonplace books as we ourselves can furnish with material of a personal character are invaluable. Nevertheless, the commonplace books of other compilers may be found useful. There are many such volumes. Dr. Little compiled *Biblical Lights*—a large volume of Scriptural quotations. Doubtless many have found it of service. I can only say that I once owned it and gave it away—for temperaments differ, methods differ, and it did not attract me. Planned rather differently, we have volumes of Biblical illustration from various Catholic pens in English, such as Vaughan's *Divine Armoury of Holy Scripture,* Lambert's *Thesaurus Biblicus or Handbook of Scripture Reference.* Williams's *Textual Concordance of the Holy Scriptures.* Cruden's *Concordance* I have found most serviceable, although, after tracing the text, one must go to Challoner and not to the King James Version.

Sermon material, however, is very various, and one may wander far afield after it. Dr. Little gave preachers another volume, entitled *Historical Lights.* This, also, I once owned and gave away, for the reason noted above.

Commonplace books for preachers are ordinarily more general in character than the two volumes thus far noted as coming from the laborious pen of Dr. Little. The most recent one

for Catholic use is Callan's *Illustrations for Sermons and Instructions.*[4] It can be cordially recommended.

In his recently published volume on *Preaching,*[5] Father O'Dowd advises the young preacher to go outside of his text-books to volumes such as Gihr's *Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,* Hedley's *The Holy Eucharist,* Rickaby's *The Lord my Light;* to read and re-read the Scriptures; and he adds: "Take note of anything you meet in your general reading which is likely to be of use in the pulpit."

Energetic note-taking is a valuable self-discipline. It is an immense aid both to the memory (for the mere concentration of mind involved in the practice is a fundamental factor in strengthening the memory) and to the intellect (for one must read slowly in order to transcribe correctly). It is a comforting source for sermon thoughts when we are hard-pressed for time in writing our sermon. It is a mark of thoughtful and conscientious man. Especially is it useful when the thoughts we note down are either original or originally commented upon by us; for "Writing maketh an exact man."

The commonplace books compiled by ourselves have all of this value which we have just

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[4] New York, 1917.
[5] 1919.

noted above. The published volumes are, unfortunately, often representative of greater industry than of good taste or homiletic appropriateness; nevertheless, nuggets of gold may be found in some of the most unpromising of them. The difficulty in respect of these published volumes, even when their compilation is presided over by the nine Muses, is that the searcher after an apt illustration may not easily find what is nevertheless there. He looks under a title which he thinks appropriate, but the item may appear under a cognate or synonymous title. He must be patient. He must also be somewhat skilled in synonymy and in the art of conjecture. He must be willing to spend perhaps twenty minutes in running his quarry down, uncertain meanwhile whether or not the quarry is really to be found there. In short, the great difficulty with published collections of illustrative material is that a preacher rarely consults them. Their proud position on his shelves represents some past enthusiasm for writing interesting sermons on his part; some intention to be methodical in his preparation, both remote and proximate, of his pulpit discourses; some initial *voluntas* that has degenerated into a mere *velleitas*.

If the innumerable sermons that appear in published volumes could be looked upon as com-

monplace books, the traditional obloquy with which they are visited by works on homiletics would be unjustifiable. If they were consulted merely for the thoughts they express upon a definite subject, or for the possibly apt illustrations their writers have managed to bring to bear upon the subjects, or for the Scriptural texts, both apt and striking, which they assemble in one place and connection, they serve the purpose of a homiletic note-book. Many of St. Alphonsus Liguori's sermons are little more than a logically-arranged series of Scriptural texts, excerpts from the Fathers, illustrative anecdotes from Christian tradition or from the daily lives of saints and sinners. They could be made very helpful.

Every sermon that is published, however, contains some suggestive thoughts. The preacher can make the thoughts his own—make them "original," as it were—by really imbibing them, assimilating them into his mental structure and growth. To borrow thus is not to steal or to pretend. "When a strikingly original thought comes to my mind," said a pungent writer, "I always turn to the old Greek dramatists in order to learn how best to express it." And, as the Wise Man remarked, there is nothing new under the sun.

Mr. Vaux battles with the traditional scorn

heaped on sermon books and sermon skeletons or sketches. There are times, he remarks, when the most painstaking preacher finds it impossible to prepare a sermon with his usual leisure. He must hurry, if he is to avoid a truly impromptu discourse: "People often talk approvingly of 'original' sermons, little thinking that in the majority of cases a *really* 'original' sermon would be pretty sure to contain a great deal of original rubbish. Be it noted that the outcome of a well-read man's mind is not, properly speaking, original matter, but the result of other and cleverer men's thoughts which he has stored up for use, as occasion may serve. But men who are not already well-read have but to take the books which happen to be at hand, and to make a sermon in the best way they can from them. It will not be as good a one as that which results from a really cultivated mind, but it will be a great deal better than anything which the preacher can produce from his own internal consciousness" (p. 41).

XVI

SERMON-TITLES

THE ordinary Sunday sermon in Catholic churches is not advertised by title or name of the preacher. There may, it is true, be exceptions to this rule. Announcement of the sermon is sometimes made a week or two in advance, if an extern to the parish is to preach, especially if he possess a reputation as a pulpit orator. In such cases, however, the announcement is made from the pulpit, and never in the newspapers.

On the other hand, a series of sermons for Lent, Advent, the Forty Hours' Devotion, a special novena or triduum, will justify the distribution of leaflets giving the name of the preacher, the titles and dates of his discourses. The titles in such a case are of some importance. They should be made as attractive as the genius of the orator will permit. The good and sufficiently obvious reason is that some people may be drawn thus to attend services which are not of obligation.

This reason is doubtless the hope that springs

eternal in the breasts of our separated brethren when they go to the length of advertising in the daily press. They must be hard put to it, however, to draw—not a crowd, but—even a slim congregation, when they resort to such ways that are dark and tricks that are vain as the following:[1]

How to Size Up City Folks. (Baptist.)
Corner Lots in Sodom. (Congregational.)
A Bad Case of the Blues. (Meth. Episc. South.)
Should White Mothers Outdo the Yellow in the Production of Children? (Universalist.)

Or the following:[2]

Are Human Feet Attractive? (Baptist.)
Some People We Meet—Triangular People. (Meth. Ep. White.)
Christ's Miracles Outdone. (Meth. Ep. White.)
The Church of the Glad Hand. (Meth. Ep. White.)
Who Killed the Whisky Giant? (Meth. Ep. White.)
A Good Fight and the Next One. (Meth. Ep. White.)
Dynamite and Dynamiters. (Meth. Ep. South.)

In respect of these titles, two things should

[1] *The Washington Post*, December 6, 1919 ("Church Notices" in the advertising pages).
[2] *The Evening Star* (Washington, D. C.), January 17, 1920 (advertising pages).

be said. First, they do not represent the garnered fruits of diligent gleaning, but of a casual, unpremeditated glance at only two newspapers of one large city. Second, that city is the National Capital—and one may fairly surmise that, because of its large floating population, the good ministers are of opinion that the most strident cry will assemble the largest crowd.

The last-mentioned title—"Dynamite and Dynamiters"—might well startle the panicky "transient" from afar as he hitches his chair to the *Evening Star*. Doubtless he would be startled if the title were the headline of a news item. If he be a man of any experience, however, he will have learned to discount such scare-heads in the "Religious Notices" of the newspapers.

This particular title may have found its origin in the title which Bishop Quayle gives to his volume [3] of sermons. Although *The Dynamite of God* sounds like an explosion, we decline to be frightened. A glance at his text shows us that we have been well advised; for the Dynamite in this case is just our Divine Lord, "the power (δύναμις) of God," as St. Paul calls Him (1 Cor. 1:24).

It would seem that the Bishop strives to se-

[3] *The Dynamite of God* (New York, 1918).

cure attention by affecting novelty in his treatment of Scriptural texts. His thirteenth sermon is headed *The Whisper of the Lord,* and its text is: "The whisper of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25:14—Vulgate, 24:14). In his exordium, he confesses that he has changed the word "secret" (of the Authorized Version) into "whisper," alleging as his reason that *sod* in Hebrew means both, and that he felt "at liberty to take the translation that breathes the thought, the especial thought, the best."

Novelty in title and treatment is desirable. But it must be exercised within the subtle restraints of a delicate taste, a sure sense of propriety. We may not alter the Divine message, but we may contrive to make people listen to it with better grace. *Non nova sed nove.* The old phrase combines a counsel and a warning. It may not be amiss, in this connection, to explore both in a brief way.

Non nova. A desire for novelty that leads to a tampering with Scriptural texts is always dangerous, seldom justifiable. This is especially true of the text that is chosen for the discourse as a sort of summary of the message. The text in such a case is usually repeated several times during the discourse. It thus fixes itself in the memory of the audience, and by an easy associa-

tion of ideas it may serve to fix as well the main lesson of the sermon in the memory both of preacher and of congregation. Although English-speaking Catholics have not a standard translation of the Bible in quite the same sense as Protestants have in their Authorized Version, the biblical texts commonly quoted are fairly fixed even in the vernacular. A novelty that distracts the attention and causes mental inquiry or surmise or wonderment, is not desirable, even though the reformed text be a slightly better translation of the original.

The desire for novelty may insensibly lead us to clearly unwarrantable lengths. Changing "the power of God" into "the dynamite of God" makes quite credible the story told of Rowland Hill, that desiring to curb his wife's love for lofty head-dressing, he preached from the text, "Top-(k)not come down" (from the terrible prophecy of Our Lord, "And let him that is on the housetop not come down"—Mark, 13:14).

What has been just said does not imply, of course, that the text, having been accurately and authoritatively quoted, may not be subject to a more intimate version in the course of a sermon to intelligent people. Thus a certain retreat-master, addressing theological students, quoted the words of Our Lord (Matt. 16:26), and then

proceeded to point out that the word *detrimentum* of the Latin ("any detriment") suggests a stronger contrast than the translation "*the loss* of his own soul."

Another danger is that novelty may degenerate into triviality. It should not appear to include symbolisms that really have no meaning or application. Was it by chance that Winston Churchill should have named so many of his novels with initial C's—*The Crisis, The Crossing, The Celebrity, Richard Carvel,* and the like? His own name begins with C. But there is really no symbolism here. There is not even a reasonable play of fancy.

Similarly, the Methodist Book Concern issued nineteen previous volumes by the Bishop. Was it quite a mere coincidence that the twentieth volume should comprise just twenty sermons?

Every sermon should have a definite object. Logically, the object to be attained should suggest the subject that is to be treated and the manner of its treatment. A novelty that is attained by the distortion of a text can hardly fail to give the reader or hearer an uncomfortable impression that the title was chosen before the sermon was begun. The end to be attained by the sermon should, like the rudder at the end of a boat, serve to direct its course. But now we find the rudder is really the title. If

we might be permitted the pleasantry—the bow of the boat is made to steer the boat, somewhat as the bow (as the title may be considered) of the sermonizer to his audience now directs his sermon.

The title in such a case will of course subtly influence the composition of the discourse. *The Dynamite of God* appears to have done this. The sermon begins: "Christ was at once a revelation and a revolution. He came to turn the world upside down, and was the chief iconoclast of history." So, too, the *The Whisper of God* suggests its opposite too strongly. Instead of the comprehensive and elegantly worded exposition by St. Gregory the Great of the verse in Job (4:12) dealing with a whisper, or the lovely restraint of the *Imitation* (III. i) dealing with the same verse, or the quiet mysticism of medievalists like Richard of St. Victor when dealing with God's whisper, we find a confused medley of sounds, high and low, strong and weak, without clear explication of the text-verse itself, or practical suggestions of how to hear the whisper.

Sed nove. The influence of title upon treatment may nevertheless be sometimes taken advantage of with propriety and success. Thus, a volume[4] of brief addresses to children takes

[4] *Morning Faces.* By the Rev. George McPherson Hunter;

its whole tone and treatment from the title of its first sermonette, which is also the title of the volume itself. *Morning Faces* suggests sunshine, cheeriness, cleanliness—and all this is the intended characteristic of the treatment. The influence is also reflex, for the author shows himself cheerily inclined toward even those men and things which so often act as a red flag to the Protestant *tòro.*

The author is telling boys and girls, for instance, that they will find powerful protection from evil in hard work, good habits, enthusiasm and zeal (chapter xxiv). Under the head of "Hard Work," he praises the discipline, self-inflicted, of the old monks: "In the days of old when the monks thought themselves assailed by the Devil they immediately applied themselves to some laborious task. Immediately jealousy, unclean desires and frivolous notions were repelled by the armour of work." Under "Enthusiasm" we find: "Joan of Arc burnt with enthusiasm for France. Francis Xavier had such an enthusiasm for God that he went to the walls of China, crying, 'Rock, O Rock, when wilt thou open unto my Maker?' " Further on (p. 118)

1918, 219 pages. Although the title is happy and the style of treatment fairly so, the volume is not recommended here for use. It is not consciously offensive to Catholic belief or practice, but has other limitations.

we read: "Benvenuto Cellini was taught to play the flute by his father, an ardent musician. The boy disliked music and would have preferred to give all his spare time to drawing; but he patiently practiced the flute until he became a very excellent performer and was chosen to assist at a concert of sacred music before the Pope. The Pontiff noted the young flutist particularly and offered him a post in his service and, learning of his love for drawing, promised that his duties and salary as court-musician should leave him plenty of time and money to pursue the drawing that was to make him famous. So does the path of duty lead in God's good time and way to the path of high usefulness and holy service."

There is such a thing as looking at our own tasks, and making others look at theirs, with "morning faces." The preacher's work is *placere, docere, movere.* Whoso has achieved this threefold requisite, *omne tulit punctum.* Now while it is true that, in recent centuries, "preaching has branched out into many eccentric varieties, from the dreary lecture to the serio-comic harangue" (to quote a writer [5] of the present day), there remains the middle path of all true eloquence of the pulpit. If novelty

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[5] Kelman, *The War and Preaching* (1919), p. 187.

of title please and attract within the bounds of reverential decorum, why should it not be cultivated?

Circumstances will alter cases and applications. The devout soul, the scholastic mind, will probably prefer a solid and wholly intelligible title such as *Meditations and Contemplations on the Passion* by Luis of Granada, or *Meditations on the Sacred Passion of Our Lord* by Cardinal Wiseman, or *Reflections on the Passion of Our Lord* by St. Alphonsus Liguori, or *History of the Passion of Our Lord* by Father Groenings. Doubtless there are still other souls that will be more attracted by imaginative or symbolic or fanciful titles covering the same general theme, such as *Ecce Homo* by Father Hubert, *Watches of the Passion* by Father Gallwey, *Dyed Garments from Bosra* published anonymously; or even the quite polar opposites of *Passion Flowers* (poems) and *A Few Simple and Business-like Ways of Devotion to the Passion* (prose), both from the pen of the Passionist, Father Edmund Hill.

Percy Fitzgerald struck a lightsome vein in his series of *Jewels*—Jewels of the Imitation, of Mass, of Prayer and Meditation. Another heartening title was that of *Golden Sands,* the *Paillettes d'Or* that ran through so many evidently popular series in France. Monsignor

Vaughan's *Faith and Folly* was a happy alliteration. *Il Libro d'Oro,* the *Golden Sayings of Brother Giles,* the *Golden Works; or Maxims of the Cross* by Thomas à Kempis, *Golden Grains, Golden Book of Meditations, Golden Key of Heaven*—these are not the less true gold because they glitter so attractively. The list of similarly gladsome headings could be continued almost indefinitely.

On the other hand, there are titles which, to many minds, may prove repellent. There is, for instance, the startling title of a volume, *Hell Opened to Christians.* It announces a terrible fact, indeed, but we may question whether many persons will buy and read Father Pinamonte's book.

What startles us may attract our attention, but it is not therefore *attractive* in the pleasurable meaning of the word. On the other hand, the flamboyant, or punning, or risible title is also fundamentally repellent. "Smartness in advertised titles of sermons," remarks a recent lecturer in Yale Divinity School, "is an abomination against which I would fain warn you. It is cheap to begin with, and brands a man as a vendor of cheap wares. And, besides that, there are but few preachers so unfortunate as to be able to keep it up. You begin with advertising as your subject 'The Prodigal from the

point of view of the Fatted Calf' or 'The submarine experiences of Jonah': you end with advertising 'A good man,' or 'A noble race.' As if any self-respecting man would cross the street to hear you on the latter subjects, or would not flee into another city rather than hear you on the former."

Dr. Kelman [6] considers the preacher "unfortunate" if he possess the ability to continue regaling his congregations with such smartness as he illustrates. On the other hand, there is the congregation to be thought of. It will surely discount the startling title in a brief experience of it. "Are human feet attractive?" The sermon so headed was preached in a church in Washington but a few weeks ago. Not improbably the preacher referred to evangelists—"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, and that preacheth peace" (Isa. 52:7). "A good fight and the next one," similarly advertised in the list already quoted, perhaps referred to St. Paul's "I have fought the good fight. . . ."

An illustration of the attractive power of certain titles is furnished by Father O'Keeffe's *Sermons in Miniature for Meditation*:[7] The Pearl Merchant, The Olive Tree, A New Sheen

[6] Kelman, *op. cit.*, p. 120, footnote.
[7] New York. 1919.

on an Old Coin, The Grain of Wheat, The Star in the East, The Net Cast Into the Sea—such titles are not more highly poetical than the imaginative language of the Scriptures themselves, and are therefore equally justifiable. One of them might receive the criticism that it is obscure, namely "A New Sheen on an Old Coin." It is, however, certainly clearer than the legend "New Light on an Old Subject" which headed an important article in the *Dublin Review,* nearly forty years ago, on the question of the authorship of the *Imitation.*

Anything that can make religious themes attractive is of service. Titles can do this. throwing argumentation into the form of dialogue or novel or drama can do this. Even the kind and color of binding given to a volume can do this. Robed in customary suit of solemn black, the joyous verse of Father Faber fails to win an audience. Protestants issue selections of his poems, as also those of Cardinal Newman, in many delightful bindings, and the poems are read by innumerable Protestants, as the many editions testify. Percy Fitzgerald combines into one dainty little volume two sermons by Massillon, and in this pretty guise *The Lukewarm Christian* finds an audience in spite of its dull title.

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APPLETON, An Analysis or Familiar Explanation of the Gospels.
BAINVEL, Les Contresens Bibliques des Prédicateurs.
BAUTAIN, The Art of Extempore Speaking.
BEECHER, Yale Lectures on Preaching.
BENSON, Hugh: Memoirs of a Brother.
BIRRELL, Obiter Dicta.
BOYD-CARPENTER, Lectures on Preaching.
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CALLAN, The Four Gospels.
CAMPBELL, Philosophy of Rhetoric.
CAMUS, The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales (Eng. tr.).
CLAUDE, An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon.
CONWAY, Principles of Sacred Eloquence.
COPPENS, The Art of Oratorical Composition.
DAVIES, Papers on Preaching.
DEMOUY, Eight Minute Sermons.
DUPANLOUP, The Ministry of Preaching (tr. Eales).
ELLICOTT, Homiletical and Pastoral Lectures.
ENGLISH, For Pulpit and Platform.
ETTER, The Preacher and the Sermon.
FEENEY, Manual of Sacred Rhetoric.
FÉNELON, Three Dialogues on Pulpit Eloquence (tr. Eales).
FOWLER, Texts for Talkers.
GIBBONS, The Ambassador of Christ.
GIGOT, General Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures.
Great French Sermons (tr. O'Mahony).
GREEN, How to Preach.
GREER, The Preacher and His Place.
GUESDON, Cours d'éloquence sacrée.

HALL, God's Word through Preaching.
HALL, Reading, Preaching and Choir Training.
HENRY, The Original Sources of European History.
HERVEY, A System of Christian Rhetoric.
HEUSER, Canon Sheehan of Doneraile.
HITCHCOCK, Sermon Composition.
HOOD, The Throne of Eloquence.
HOPPIN, Homiletics.
HOWELL, S. Bernardino of Siena.
HOYT, The Work of Preaching.
HUNTER, Morning Faces.
Instructions on Preaching (tr. Boyle).
ISENRING, Hermeneutics, or Rules for Interpreting the Vulgate, according to the Mind of St. Francis de Sales.
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KELMAN, The War and Preaching.
KERN, The Ministry to the Congregation.
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LE CAMUS, The Life of Christ.
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MAAS, The Life of Jesus Christ.
MACLAREN, The Cure of Souls.
MAHAFFY, The Decay of Modern Preaching.
MAITLAND, The Dark Ages.
MARKOE, Impressions of a Layman.
MEYENBERG, Homiletic and Catechetic Studies.
Ministry of Preaching, The (tr. Eales).
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MONTGOMERY, St. Augustine's Aspects of His Life and Thought.
MULLOIS, The Clergy and the Pulpit (tr. Badger).
NEALE, Mediæval Preachers, and Mediæval Preaching.
NEVILLE, The Use of the Eyes in Preaching.
OAKELEY, The Priest on the Mission.
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INDEX

A

"Accommodated sense," 145
  desirability of its use, 156
  rules for use of, 158
  St. Francis de Sales on, 145
Allegory, illustrations by, 169
Almaras, M., on brevity of sermon, 36
  on length of sermon, 20
Almsgiving, Swift's sermon on, 52
Alphabetical arrangement of notes, 249
Anecdotage, sermon, 186
  example of, 188
Anecdote, as introduction of sermon, 201
  authenticity of, 198
  explanation of, 188
  for attention, 124
  for clearness, 189
  for illustration, 170
  for interest, 190
  introducing, 192
  of negro slave, 200
  of St. Paul, 201
  personal, 170
Attention, methods of gaining, 124
  use of anecdote for, 124
Attractiveness in sermon-titles, 274

B

Bautain on the plan, 217
Beginning the sermon, Feeney on, 221
Belley, Bishop of, on short sermon, 35
Bellord, Bishop, sermon of, on Hell, 60
Benevelos, attentos, dociles, 121
Benson, Msgr., a feat of, 40
  plan of, 211
Bible, fables of, 205
Bizarre, the, in introductions, 132
Blessed Fisher, introduction of, 125
Books, cutting up for notes, 253
  of reference, 115
Bourdaloue, opening text of, 141
  Voltaire's criticism of, 140
Brevity in the introduction, 120
Brevity in the sermon, 25
  McGinnes on, 36
  method of achieving, 46, 53

Brevity in the sermon, St. Francis de Sales on, 43
Stevenson on, 46
versus rapidity, 27
Broadus on the fable, 205
Bushnell, on length of ordinary sermon, 42

C

Card-index, 248
Cards, use of, for notes, 249
examples of, 253, 261
Catechetical sermons, 104
Chesterton on church attendance, 97
on definiteness in preaching, 103
on dullness of sermons, 100
on theology, 102
Cicero, introductions of, 129
Clearness, 24, 60
gained by anecdote, 189
Clippings from periodicals, etc., 251
pasting on cards, 253
repertory for, 251
Collection sermon, method of treating, 92
Commonplace books, personal, 254, 262
of other compilers, 269
Composition of introduction, suggestions for, 131
Conciseness in the sermon, 26
Mullois on, 27, 53
Connectives, use of, 28
Controversial sermons, method of treating, 105
Conway on opening text, 139
Council of Trent on the sermon, 43
"Counsel, practical" for preachers, 224
Cross-indexing reference cards, 253
Cum perverso, etc., mistranslation of, 147

D

Da mihi animas, mistranslation of, 150
"Deep heart" misapplication of, 151, 156
Definiteness in sermons, Chesterton on, 103
Delivery of miniature sermon, 56
Demosthenes, introductions of, 129
Detail, the, 220
Diction, plainness in, 60
Diffuse style, example of, 67
Direct method in controversial sermons, 105
Doctrinal sermon, definite object of, 90, 96
explanation of, 103
Dogmatic sermons, 104
necessity of, 106
requirements of, 108
St. Francis de Sales on, 109
treatment of objections in, 112
Dupanloup, Bishop, on eloquence, 81
on length of ordinary sermon, 41
on long sermon, 36

E

Eight-minute sermon, 57
Elaboration, Maclaren on, 231

Eloquence, Dupanloup on, 81
Enunciation of the miniature sermon, 56
Epiphany, sixth Sunday after, object of sermon for, 91
"E pòi" story, the, 198
Experience, common, illustrations by, 166
Extempore preaching, Neville's plan for, 234
Storrs on, 241
Extempore sermon, 23

F

Fable and parable, 204
Broadus on, 205
in Bible, 205
use of in sermon, 204
Fathers of the Church, brevity of, 40
Feeney on the plan, 221
Fénelon on the long sermon, 16
Fifteen-minute sermon, 45
Five-minute sermon, 48
of Canon Sheehan, 50
of Paulists, 51
Flattery, 38
Florid style, Ruskin on the, 74

G

"Grand" occasions, sermons for, 13
average length of, 40
"Greek" sermon, 59
Guesdon on note-taking, 250

H

Half-hour sermon, 41
Half-hour Sunday service, 48
Halloft, Pastor, and the short sermon, 30
High Mass, sermon for, 16
Hitchcock on the plan, 219
Howson, Dean, on Englishman's family dinner, 16
on short sermon, 38
on Sunday sermon, 44
Hrabanus Maurus, Homily of, 203

I

Illustration, aid of compilations for, 182
allegory as, 169
a "telling," 265
books of biblical, 269
common experience as, 166
cumulative, 197
explanation of, 174
in Sermon on Mount, 173
metaphor as, 178
moderation in, 179
monotony of, 181
of Maitland, 166
of Our Lord, 175
sermon, 166
simplicity of, 168
sources of, 175
stories as, 173, 189
Inaccuracy in use of texts, 152
Indexing the notes, 248
Indirect method in controversial sermons, 106
Instruction, parochial, length of, 41
Interest created by anecdote, 190
by parable, 194

Introduction of sermon, 116
bizarre in, 132
kindliness of, 121
necessity of, 118
of Blessed Fisher, 125
of Our Lord, 131
of St. Paul, 116
strikingness of, 124, 132
suggestions on, 131
transition of, 128
variety of, 129

K

Keatinge, Father, on the long sermon, 16
Kelman on the length of the Sunday sermon, 42
on note-taking, 251
Kindliness of introduction, 121
"Kingdom of heaven suffereth," etc., meaning of, 152

L

Latin text, use of, 133
Layman, and the short sermon, 32
Leaflets to advertise sermons, 274
Length of sermon, for Lent, 19
for ordinary occasion, 41
modern tendency in, 21
St. Alphonsus on, 19
subject matter as determinant of, 22
summary of views on, 41
Lent, sermons for, length of, 19
Literal interpretation of texts, 146
Long sermon, 11
Dupanloup on, 36
Fénelon on, 16
Keatinge on, 16
Markoe on, 15
Mullois on, 12
Oakeley on, 16
St. Francis Borgia and, 18, 34
St. Francis de Sales on, 15, 34
Taylor on, 46
Low Mass, miniature sermon for, 57
ordinary sermon for, 48

M

McGinnes, Father, on brevity, 36
McKenna, Father, preparation of, for preaching, 267
Maclaren on arrangement of matter, 231
on elaboration, 231
on gathering material, 229
on reflection, 231
Maitland, illustrations of, 166
on "Dark Ages," 166, 169
style of, 178
Markoe, Ralston, on long sermons, 15
on short sermons, 32
on twenty-minute sermon, 46
Mass, high, sermon for, 16
low, sermon for, 48, 57
Massillon, oration over Louis, 52

Material, Maclaren on, 229
mechanical method of gathering, 228, 245
reading for, 228
seminary president on, 260
sermon books as sources of, 272
Memorizing the plan, 238
Metaphor, illustrations by, 178
Meyenberg on arrangement of matter, 208
on the plan, 207
Miniature Sermon, 48
enunciation of, 56
for Low Mass, 57
skeleton of, 54
Mirabilis Deus, etc., mistranslation of, 151
Missionary work, treatment of sermon on, 94
Mistranslation, example of, 147
Moeslein on the plan, 214
Monotony of illustrations, 181
Moral sermon, 104
definite object of, 90
Motive, glad, 220
grand, 220
sad, 220
Mullois on long sermon, 11, 23
on miniature sermon, 48
on seven-minute sermon, 51
on short sermon, 37, 45
Mustard-seed sermon, object of, 91

N

Natural history, example taken from, 264
Newman on the object of the sermon, 86
Non nobis, Domine, misinterpretation of, 161
Note-books, 245
variety of, 247
Notes, alphabetical arrangement of, 249
cards for, 249
clippings for, 251
cutting up books for, 253
discrimination in taking, 270
energetic taking of, 270
indexing, 248
Kelman on, 257
Maclaren on, 229
moderation in, 252
O'Dowd on, 251
of Archbishop Ryan, 266
topical arrangement of, 249
Vaux on, 266
while traveling, 252
Novelty in sermon titles, 277
Numerical arrangement of thoughts, 208

O

Oakeley, on long sermon, 16
Object of sermon, 77
choosing, 91
negative side of, 78
Newman on, 86
of moral sermon, 90
of Sunday sermon, 41
on mustard-seed, 91
particular, 83
St. Augustine on, 88
St. Bernardine on, 88
St. Francis de Sales on, 84

Objections, treatment of, in dogmatic sermon, 112
Obscurity in sermon, examples of, 110
O'Dowd on note-taking, 251
on plan, 207
Opening text, 133
authority of, 134
Conway on, 139
in Bourdaloue's sermons, 141
Protestant preachers on, 137
St. Francis de Sales on, 135
value of, 140
Ordinary sermon, length of, 41
Potter on, 41
Our Lord, illustrations of, 175
introduction of, 131
parables of, 202
similes of, 178
Overillustration, 196

P

Parable, as illustration, 192
compared with fable, 204
in St. Luke, 196
interest created by, 194
of Lazarus, 39
of mustard-seed, objects of, 91
of Nathan, 202
of Our Lord, 202
of Thecua, 202
Parochial instructions, length of, 41
Paulists, five-minute sermon of, 51
Periodicals, cutting up for notes, 253
instance of, 262
Personal anecdote, 170
as introduction, 202
value of, 125
Personal note in preaching, 122
Picture, the, 220
Plain sermons, 59
Plan, Bautain on, 217
Feeney on, 221
Hitchcock on, 219
Meyenberg on, 207
necessity of, 207
O'Dowd on, 207
of Msgr. Benson, 211
of Ven. Strambi, 215
St. Alphonsus on, 210
St. Francis Borgia on, 209
suggestions for, 208
Pompous phraseology, illustration of, 72
Popular sermon, 173
example of, 173
Potter on length of ordinary sermon, 41
Preacher, "practical counsel" for, 224
St. Francis de Sales' estimate of, 78
visiting, 13
Preaching, extempore, plan for, 234
preparation for, 207
Preparation for preaching, 207
of Archbishop Ryan, 267
of Father McKenna, 267
Present-day writing, 39
Proof, the, 220

Proposition, the, or suggestion, 220
Propriety in sermon-titles, 277

R

Raw material, Maclaren's arrangement of, 231
Meyenberg on, 208
Reading, as a stimulant, 222
for material, 228
popular writers and preachers, 245
Reference, books of, 115
Reference cards, 249
cross-indexing, 253
Reflection, Maclaren on, 231
necessity for, 228
Storrs on, 241
Refutation, the, 220
Repertory for clippings, etc., 251
Ruskin on the florid style, 74
Ryan, Archbishop, notes of, 266
preparation of, for preaching, 207

S

Sacred Heart, sermons on, dryness in, 113
misapplication of text to, 151, 156
St. Alphonsus Liguori on length of the sermon, 19
on plan, 210
St. Ambrose, sermons of, average length of, 42
St. Augustine on object of sermon, 87
St. Bernardine of Siena and object of sermon, 88
St. Chrysostom on the Parable of Lazarus, 39
St. Francis Borgia and the long sermon, 18, 34
on the plan, 209
St. Francis de Sales, effects conversion by short sermon, 35
on "accommodated sense," 145
on brevity of Fathers, 40
on dogmatic sermons, 109
on good preacher, 78
on object of sermon, 77
on opening text, 135
on short sermon, 40
St. Francis of Assisi on brevity, 43
St. Paul, anecdote of, 201
introduction of, 116
sermon of, at Troas, 11
St. Thomas Aquinas, quotations of, from Scripture, 164
Scholastics, Hall on, 159
Scope, the, 220
Scrap-books, use of, 248
Sermon, eight-minute, 57
extraordinary, 13, 40
fifteen-minute, 45
five-minute, 48, 50, 51
half-hour, 41
illustration, 173
long, 11, 34, 46
miniature, 48, 54
on the Mount, 38, 173
ordinary, 41

Sermon, seven-minute, 48
short, 29
Sunday, 41, 89
ten-minute, 46
twenty-minute, 44
Sermonette, the, 55
Sermons, books of, as notebooks, 272
Sermon-titles, 274
examples of, 283
propriety in, 277
Seven-minute sermon, 48
Mullois on, 51
Sheehan, and the short sermon, 29, 49
five-minute sermon of, 50
Short sermon, 29
Bishop of Belley on, 35
Halloft on, 30
Howson on, 38
layman and, 32
of St. Francis de Sales, 35
Sheehan and, 29, 49
Valuy on, 44
Similes of Our Lord, 178
Simplicity of illustration, 168
of vocabulary, 74
Skeleton, of miniature sermon, 54
Stevenson, R. L., on brevity, 46
Stories, use of, in illustration, 173, 189
Storrs on the plan, 241
Strikingness of introduction, 124, 132
Subject-matter as determinant of sermon length, 22
Suggestion (or proposition), the, 220
Suggestions for a plan, 208
Summa Theologica for young preachers, 114
Sunday Sermon, Howson on, 44
Kelman on, 42
length of, 41
object of, 89
Supposition, the, 177
Swift, Dean, sermon of, on almsgiving, 52

T

Taylor on long sermon, 22
Ten-minute sermon, 46
Texts, inaccuracy in use of, 152
interpretation of, 146
Latin, use of, 133
opening, 133
Theology in sermons, 113
Thoughts, numerical arrangement of, 208
stimulating the flow of, 222
Titles for sermons, attractiveness in, 274
novelty in, 277
propriety in, 277
"Tools," the, of the preacher, 226
Topical arrangement of notes, 249
Topical sermons, 104
Transition of the introduction, 128
Traveling, note-taking while, 252
"Triumvirate, The Great," 142
Twenty-minute sermon, 44

U

Unfamiliar words, 61
Unity in the sermon, 26
"Universal Index," the, 248

V

Valuy on short sermons, 44
Variety of introduction, 129
Vaux on note-taking, 266
Ven. Strambi, plan of, 215
Visiting preacher, 13
Vocabulary, simplicity of, 74

W

Words, unfamiliar, 61
Writing the sermon, English on, 240
  Feeney on, 221
  Greer on, 240
  Lyman on, 242

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